

Interweave April 2012 Connect

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Special Transgender Focus Issue

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Maryka Bhattacharyya, President and Valerie White, Treasurer



Is your Congregation a Chapter of Interweave?
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Message from the President: Feedback on Creating Change 2012!

The 24th National Conference on LGBT Equality: Creating Change took place in Baltimore, Maryland, January 25–29. More than 2,700 people from all over the country attended the five-day program that featured over 350 workshops and training sessions. Plus there were four spectacular plenary sessions and tons of networking opportunities.



Three board members represented Interweave Continental at the conference: I led the workshop, Rethinking LGBTQ Pride: Pride as Social Witness, under the category Practice Spirit, Do Justice. Valerie White gave our treasurer's report at the annual meeting of Interweave Continental, which we held at Creating Change. While the meeting was not heavily attended, it was good to see several congregations represented. Nisco Junkins interacted with many attendees, gathering valuable formation for future newsletters!

I will briefly describe three highlights of the conference program. How could my workshop be other than a highlight, when I worked so hard on it? My main aim was to discuss the meaning of the terms witness and pride, and then introduce Rev. Erin Swenson (left in photo), a transgender Presbyterian minister from Atlanta GA, whose life's journey is a wonderful example of the courage of her



public witness and the central role that pride ultimately played in her inspiring journey to become the first ordained transgender minister in the Presbyterian church. Look her up on the web. I heard her speak at GA. She is awesome!



Feedback on Creating Change 2012!

A second highlight was the workshop, A Mother, Her Transgender Son, Their Journey to Acceptance and Love. You will meet Aiden and his family later in this newsletter. Many were in tears during this workshop. I learned so much about how to better relate to my own son. During the discussion, so many participants raised questions about their own family relationships, seeking answers to difficult problems. Everyone seemed to be changed by the experience of being in that room. There was a point in Aiden's mother's life when she realized she was saying, "I love you, Aiden" and he was answering with "umph", some other sound, of no answer at all. You know how sometimes, in your struggle as a young person – trans or not, you are not ready to say those words.

That went on for a long time. Then one day as Aiden left the house, his mother said, "I love you, Aiden" and there was a long pause. Then Aiden said, "Mom, I love you more".

The third highlight was Rev Dr. Jonipher Kwong, who represented the UU church at the final Interfaith Service on Sunday morning. Rev Kwong is the first openly gay, asian minister at the First Unitarian Church of Honolulu. He was born in the Phillipines but spent most of his life in California and Hawaii. He



lives with his partner of 13 years. Rev Kwong offered Buddhist insights and

practices to the Sunday morning service. His gentle spirit was most inspiring.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter and distribute it to all those who might appreciate it. Nisco Junkins and Tova Vitiello are becoming masters at generating this monthly communication!

As always, I encourage each of you to join Interweave Continental as individual members or as chapters. We are a totally volunteer organization that relies solely on your generosity for our continued survival. Please go to our website and help give us the means to keep on keeping on! We appreciate all that you do and want to support your efforts. Maryka Bhattacharyya, President Interweave Continental

Interweave Annual Sermon Contest Contest

Each year, the Interweave Continental Sermon Contest rewards the best sermon in support of LGBTQ issues. Entries must have been first preached before a UU congregation or in a seminary setting between April 1 of the previous year and April 1 of the current year. There is a \$250 prize for the winner.

Sermons for the 2012 award are now invited for submission with a May 1, 2012 deadline. Sermons should be submitted by the sermon author or another individual via email to: marykahb@yahoo.com.

Keeping in mind this year's Justice General Assembly focus on addressing the immigrant experience, immigration rights and racial equality, sermons that address these oppressions, as they intersect with those experienced by the LGBTQ community, will be given priority in judging. That said, please consider that all sermons that speak to LGBTQ issues are encouraged.

The award for best sermon will be presented at the annual Interweave Continental luncheon planned for the June 2012 Justice GA, in Phoenix, Arizona.

Mark DeWolfe Award- Time to submit your applications!

Each year, Interweave Continental's Mark DeWolfe Award honors a Unitarian Universalist who has substantially contributed to improving the lives of LGBTQ people, whether in or outside of Unitarian Universalist settings.

Nominations, to be submitted via email, should provide the individual's name and location (UU congregation), along with a detailed description of the outstanding and ongoing investment in improving the lives of LGBTQ community

members made by the nominee. Be sure to include the name of the individual or group submitting the application, and contact information for the individual submitting, so that notification can occur upon selection of the award winner. (Non-winning submissions will not be notified).

Deadline for submission: May 1, 2012 via email to: marykahb@yahoo.com



NAACP President Ben Jealous

At the 24th National Conference on LGBT Equality Thursday in Baltimore, NAACP president Benjamin Jealous delivered the keynote address, pledging support for marriage equality, antibullying efforts, and discrimination protections for transgender people. Jealous spoke about his transgendered brother and the need to end discrimination everywhere.

"I stand before you today as an individual deeply invested in the struggle but also as the leader of an organization with strong connections to the fight for LGBT rights," he said.

"My brother Jason is faced discrimination at a very early age because of his transgender identity... it didn't strike us as odd he had been dressing in dresses and wearing wigs and singing Diana Ross since he was 2. But some other folks didn't see it quite the same way."



By Neal Broverman

Message from the
President1



Marsha Aizumi and Her Family

A Mother, Her Transgender
Son, and Their Journey to
Acceptance and Love.

When asked about the Creating Change Conference in Maryland, Marsha Aizumi revealed that it was extremely memorable. She said: "It was a trip of a lifetime . . . my entire family attending the 2012 Creating Change Conference, where Aiden and I presented a workshop called A Mother, Her Transgender Son, Their Journey to Acceptance and Love. The success of this workshop came as the result of all five of us working together.

I couldn't have done it alone. Participants shared that they walked away from our presentation determined to be more patient, more accepting and showing up more with their parents. Moving from fear to love is not easy but I believe it is possible, if you speak your truth with compassion and vulnerability. I felt like our family was part of creating change."

Speaking about their journey through Aiden's transition as a family, Marsha said it has helped her realize how important it is for families to support their children. People have come up to her and thanked her for supporting Aiden. According to Marsha, those were moments when it really struck her just how many LGBT youth do not receive the love and support that they need from their families, and this realization has strengthened her commitment to help bring greater awareness and tools for

families to connect with each other.

Marsha explains to people that the journey through transition is a transition for the whole family. She believes that despite the fear, uncertainty and difficult moments,

there are also moments of tremendous growth and unforgettable experiences that deepen bonds between family members.

Marsha says, "this experience has changed our family's life in such a positive way."

Going through the process together has helped

her and her family to love more honestly, communicate more openly, and forgive more easily. Marsha says, "this experience has changed our family's life in such a positive way." In addition, she adds that you must be willing to move into that change to realize how positive it can be. Admitting that change always comes with some level of fear about how things will turn out.





The UU Church of Eugene, Oregon

Director of Religious Education, Katy Siefert and a group of students, all young women, brought a celebration of Lady GAGA's song "Born this Way" to UU Eugene, OR for a worship service. We clapped our hands and felt beautiful "Cause God Makes no mistakes." It was truly a religious experience.

I'm beautiful in my way
 'Cause God makes no mistakes
 I'm on the right track, baby
 I was born this way
 Don't hide yourself in regret
 Just love yourself and you're set
 I'm on the right track, baby
 I was born this way
 Don't be a drag -- just be a queen
 Whether you're broke or evergreen
 You're black, white, beige, chola descent
 You're Lebanese, you're orient
 Whether life's disabilities
 Left you outcast, bullied, or teased
 Rejoice and love yourself today
 'cause baby you were born this way
 No matter gay, straight, or bi,
 Lesbian, transgendered life,
 I'm on the right track baby,
 I was born to survive.
 No matter black, white or beige
 Chola or orient made,
 I'm on the right track baby,
 I was born to be brave.
 I'm on the right track baby
 I was born this way hey!

"Born This Way", by American pop singer-songwriter, Lady Gaga.

10 Ways to be More Understanding and Welcoming of Transgender People

1. Make no assumptions about gender identity or sexual orientation.
2. Respect a person's identity and self-label, and respect a person's chosen name and pronoun preference.
3. Do not assume a trans person is all-knowing and/or wants to speak about trans issues. Do not assume a trans person can speak only about their trans identity, nor that it is or is not an issue at all.
4. Recognize that "transgender" is not a sexual orientation and educate yourself and others on the distinctions between sexual orientation and gender identity/ expression. Don't say "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender" if you are only taking about sexuality. Recognize that a person can identify with more than one of those labels.
5. Use terms that encompass all genders rather than only two (e.g., "children" instead of "boys and girls"; "people" instead of "women and men"; "siblings" instead of "brothers and sisters").
6. Review member policies for your boy's/men's and girl's/women's groups—do they make room to include transgender folks? If your congregation ever uses forms that ask for gender, think about whether that information is necessary. If it is, include a "Transgender" option, as well as a box for "Other." Also, ask for "gender" rather than "sex."
7. Talk to children about transgender issues. Provide age-appropriate education around understanding one's gender identity and how gender roles and norms play out in our society.
8. Create single stall, ADA-accessible bathroom(s) and label them in a welcoming way (e.g., as "gender neutral" or "all gender"). Make sure your signs elsewhere communicate that these bathroom(s) are available and point the way.
9. Do continuing education for your congregation specifically on transgender issues. You might consider the "Transgender Identity" workshop in the Welcoming Congregation Handbook, the transgender curriculum from the Institute for Welcoming Resources, a film showing and discussion, a panel discussion, and/or a sermon on the topic.
10. Learn about local laws and how to change them if they are not inclusive (e.g., non-discrimination policies around employment, housing, credit, and public accommodations; name changes; and gender marker changes).¹learn more

From the UUA's office of LGBT Ministries. For more resources on transgender identity and welcome, please go to www.uua.org/lgbt/identity/25348.shtml or contact Alex Kapitan at lgbt@uua.org.

To all UU Ministers:
 Please forward copies of Interweave Connect to all LBGTO people and allies in your congregation that would like to receive our newsletter.
 Thank you,
 Interweave Continental Board

**New Report
 Outlines
 Blueprint For
 Transgender
 Equality
 click here**



Switch: A Community in Transition

A Documentary Film that addresses the impact of gender transition on the surrounding community

by Brooks Nelson, Portland-area Filmmaker

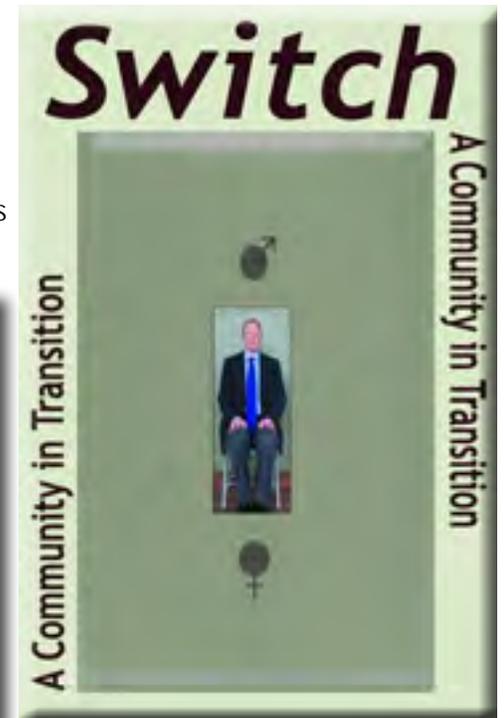
What we realized we had to be more conscious about the reality that each individual has different responsibilities to others based on the sphere within which we interact. For example our responsibilities to family members may be different than friends, is different from coworker, is different from co – congregant. We also found the importance of recognizing that each individual has a set of cultural factors and filters through which to view the world. More specifically, cultural filters we may have around race, class, physical ability, gender identity or sexual orientation may impact our views on a variety of issues including gender identity and transgender people.

Personally, as a filmmaker I saw the opportunity to document the process of finding ways to open conversations with our broader community about the impact of my transition on them.

The conscious understanding of these factors allowed us to have frank conversations with people from different spheres and be able to relate to them better. What on paper seems like an intellectual exercise truly allowed for people to share in deep and emotional ways about their struggles, and I believe made an easier path for them to become allies for transgendered community. Frankly, they were glad we asked, and I believe it is being effective.

Switch has been shown in colleges, festivals and congregations across the country. I have been able to attend and engage folks directly. The power of hearing personal stories and struggles from the audience is profound – the lesbian mom in Indiana with a trans son, who got some comfort from seeing my mother in law on screen; or the evangelical Christians in College Station, Texas who needed to be able to ask faith based questions about trans issues and could see and hear about inclusive and thriving spiritual communities. The results have been deep, thoughtful, conversations and a way to move challenges to the foreground as communities work to become better allies to transgender and gender queer people in your community.

If you would like to watch it with your congregation, for copies, contact Interweave Continental to schedule a screening contact Brooks at www.boxxo.org.



The chances that you will know, work with, or be related to a transgendered person are much higher than the chances you will be transgendered yourself, yet the resources to help surrounding communities understand and work through someone’s transition are virtually nonexistent. While there are many great films about what transgendered people go through on their journey to become fully themselves, the core focus of the film *Switch: A community in transition* is to address the impact on family, friends, coworkers and spiritual communities.

My partner and I are active members of our community and congregation (Ainsworth United Church of Christ in Portland, Oregon) and during the process of my own gender transition we found that our family and friends were struggling to understand the changes in our lives. As we worked to understand their challenges we found some critical issues that we believe needed to be addressed in order to help others understand.

Switch: A Community in Transition

This documentary film by Brooks Nelson focuses on the impact that a person’s gender transition has on the people and communities closest to them. Rather than spotlighting the individual who is transitioning, this film showcases the stories of family members, friends, coworkers, and fellow congregants as they speak personally and frankly about their experiences. The film delves into the complexity and diversity of gender, as well as the ways age, race, male privilege, and physical ability impact how we are seen in the world. Guaranteed to spark vibrant conversation in any group concerned with how to support and affirm transgender and gender non-conforming community members.

by Alex Kapitan, LGBT Ministries, UUA [View the Trailer](#)



A Woman Called Dad

by Paula Sophia Schonauer

before I transitioned I was an avid motorcycle rider. I loved riding down Western Oklahoma highways during the wheat harvest, watching the golden waves of grain, feeling the warm sun on my face, listening to the wind. I felt connected to the world in a special way when riding my bike, racing trains, stopping under interstate bridges when it rained, smelling the ozone of a nearby lightning strike and listening to the rumble of thunder echoing among the steel beams and concrete. But, I gave it up when I became Paula because I'd convinced myself that riding a motorcycle was too macho.

It wasn't just the masculine stereotype; it was the clothes. I can't wear petite leather vests and cute halters. I can't find fringed jackets in my size, nor can I wear high-heeled boots. I was afraid if I wore what fit and what was comfortable on a motorcycle, I'd look like a guy. But after a few years of lusting after motorcycles flying by me on the interstate, envying their freedom, and after I met a number of lesbians who rode motorcycles, I decided to get a bike. So what if I have to wear men's jackets, vests and boots – things made more for safety than fashion.

Now, my spouse Pam and I ride all the time. We go to poker runs and biker bars just being ourselves. Some of the other bikers nod at me, smile and say, "You rebel your way, and I'll rebel mine." I like that. It's a wonderful affirmation, the recognition as a fellow rebel.

My children taught me how to think beyond the male-female binary, taught me that a woman can be a dad, that more important than being a man or a woman is being an authentic person. They've taught me the words, mom and dad, are not pronouns but relationships. I learned from them that I don't have to abandon the masculinity that still works for me, nor do I have to suppress my femininity. Because of their influence, I'm as close to being a whole person as I've ever been, and I'm free from the rigid role expectations that oppressed me before and even after my transition.

Recently, I climbed on my motorcycle and rode down the highway with my daughter sitting behind me singing into my ear. "I love you, Daddy," she said, wrapping her arms tight around my waist.

"I love you, too."

Then I rolled on the power, feeling the wind, hearing the whine of the engine, happy to be alive, moving on in life, balanced on two wheels.

Yeah, finally... balanced.

Paula Sophia Schonauer is a nineteen-year veteran with the Oklahoma City Police Department.

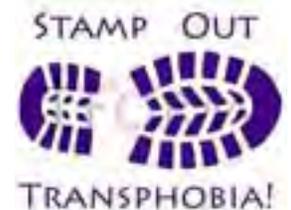
You will be hearing more from Paula.

The other day my daughter looked at me misty-eyed and sincere. "I love you, Daddy," she said. Now, that might not sound so strange, but when you consider that I'm a male-to-female transsexual who transitioned almost ten years ago, the word "daddy" can stick out like a thistle with the ability to scratch, irritate, fester and wound.

My children watched me transition at fairly young ages. My son was ten and my daughter was three years old when I began my real life test. Of course, we talked about what they would call me, and we decided on the name "Sophie" since my new middle name was going to be Sophia. I assured them that they'd be the only ones to call me Sophie, since they'd been the only ones who'd called me Dad. Over time, though, my children abandoned the Sophie tag. They reverted back to calling me Dad, and I didn't discourage it, mostly because I didn't want them to feel like they'd lost their father because of my transition.

My children's need to call me Dad wasn't based on denial. They accepted my newly manifested gender expression very well. My son told me he liked me better as Paula since I wasn't a "drill sergeant" anymore, and my daughter treated me like a mother in most ways, consistently using the she and her pronouns. So, I accepted my role as a woman called Dad. In fact, I embraced it. The only remnant of Sophie is a nickname my daughter affectionately bestowed upon me. Sometimes she calls me "Sofa," because I'm as big and comfy as the living room couch.

Being a woman called Dad has opened my mind to the fluidity of gender, the artificiality of roles and expectations based upon gender, and the way gender oppression limits our lives. For example,





Boy, Girl, Neither, Both

by Tova Vitiello, Ph.D. Psychology Professor, Emeritus
Editor, Interweave Connect

Interweave Co-chair: Unitarian Universalist Society, Iowa City, IA

This article may seem too academic for Interweave Connect; however, I want to write a piece that addresses issues concerning the complexity of gender, gender identity and gender expression. Current research finds that the interactions of genetics, prenatal hormones, anatomical structures, and experiences in life determine gender, gender identity, and gender expression. The research supports what Christine Jorgensen, Renee Richards and other transgender people told us years ago. Some of us did not listen. Some of us listened, but we did not hear. As gender identity is increasingly acknowledged as being more complex than the traditionally recognized male and female options, we must inform ourselves in order to support the rights and the dignity of all people.

Our gender identity is fundamental to the way we experience ourselves and others, and it is more diverse and complicated than our culture recognizes, values or celebrates. Current thought argues that we are not limited to only male and female gender identities.

Between eighteen months and three years, children develop a sense of gender identity. While most children develop an identity that matches their biological sex, some children develop the gender identity of the other sex, some of neither sex, and some of both sexes.

Thus, the term transgender is used as an umbrella term encompassing all the ways in which people challenge "traditional" concepts of gender, gender identity, and gender expression.

According to Leslie Feinberg, a transgender, political activist and writer, the

term "transgender" includes masculine females, feminine males, cross-dressers, transsexual men, transsexual women, intersexuals, gender benders, gender blenders, and many other sex and gender-variant people. It includes individuals who adopt a gender identity or expression contrary to the gender assigned to them at birth, or who live with ambiguous genitalia, or a disjuncture between their internal and external sex anatomy. Transgender includes people who have changed their gender from one assigned at birth through whatever means, as well as those who present in a manner not usually associated with the sex of their genitalia.

Recently, some researchers in the fields, such as anthropology, psychology, medicine, and sociology, have taken the position that there are more than two genders. For example, Fausto-Sterling (2000) theorized that there are five sexes: 1. males; 2. females; 3. "herms," who are individuals born with both testes and ovaries; 4. "merms," who are anatomically more male than female, but possess some aspect of female genitalia; and 5. "ferms," who have ovaries, but possess some aspect of male genitalia.

In the past, psychologists tried to distinguish the terms sex and gender. Sex referred to the biological division between males and females. When we identified physiological or anatomical differences between men and women, we were speaking about sexual organs. A person was either a man or a woman, depending on male or female genitalia.

Gender, however, was considered a psychological concept that distinguished masculinity from femininity. Gender was reserved for differences that were learned. Today, this division no longer exists. These two terms (sex and gender) are interchangeable.

Many people believe that a person is either a man or a woman, depending on XY genes and male genitalia, or XX genes and female genitalia. However, science teaches us that gender identity is more ambiguous and complex.

In most infant births, the observed sex of the baby is consistent with the genetic sex. When there is a scrotum and penis, we assume XY chromosomes and a boy. When there is a vagina, we assume XX chromosomes and a girl. However, this is not always the case. There are situations when the physically observed sex of a newborn does not correspond to the genetic sex. Because some physicians and psychologists have argued that gender is a socially acquired, learned behavior, physicians and parents have been known to assign a sex.

Such is the case for Intersex individuals who are born with ambiguous genitalia or physical characteristics of both genders, associated with hormonal or other physical factors. Depending on their particular combination of characteristics, Intersex individuals are usually assigned to a specific sex at birth, often undergoing immediate surgery as well as hormonal treatment in order to alter their genital anatomy. Since female genitals are easier to construct, the newborn infant is generally considered a girl.

This medical practice was supported by the belief that children accept the gender in which they are raised. However, a study conducted by Reiner and Gearhart (2004) and published in the New England Journal of Medicine, found

that there are hormonal influences on the developing infant's brain that cause children to identify as male or female, regardless of social conditions. The study followed sixteen genetic males with cloacal exstrophy. These infants were born without penises, or with very small ones, even though they had normal male hormones, normal testes, and XY chromosome pairs. Fourteen of these children underwent early sex-reassignment surgery and were raised as girls. Doctors instructed the parents not to reveal the medical histories to the children.

Researchers followed the development of the children and assessed their gender identities and behaviors between the ages of five to sixteen years old. In the initial assessment, three of the children spontaneously asserted they were male. In a follow-up assessment, six of the children identified as male and three reported unclear gender identity. Two of the children, who had been raised from birth as male, continued to identify as male. All of the children exhibited male-typical behavior, such as wanting to play with guns and trucks as socialized with males. The researchers, therefore, argue that gender identity "appears to be primarily influenced by biology." These findings challenge the theory that gender identity is a socially derived learned behavior.

A review of medical literature reveals that some doctors are rethinking early genital surgery that results in gender assignment. An increasing number of medical professionals and psychologists suggest that doctors examine the particular condition of Intersex individuals, and perform surgery only when absolutely necessary. They argue that Intersex individuals should only undergo surgery when the particular condition will lead to a specific gender identity.

As a researcher in London in 1990, Dr. Andrew Sinclair was the first to identify the sex-determining region of the human Y chromosome (SRY). By the end of 1994, several sex-determining genes had been discovered. Initially, it was assumed that the SRY gene was the initiator of genetic events. Now, it is thought that an unknown gene triggers the SRY gene.

According to scientists, gender development begins at conception when the presence of the SRY gene determines physical gender. If the SRY is present, the development process results in a male. If the SRY is absent, then the embryo becomes a female. Every fetus begins existence with a set of undifferentiated gonads (neither testes nor ovaries), and two tiny ducts, the Mullerian and Wolffian. In the course of typical male development, the SRY gene prompts the fetus to release a hormone called TDF (testes determining factor) which turns the undifferentiated gonads into testes. The formation of testes, initiates the production of testosterone and Mullerian-inhibiting substance (MIS). This process stops the

development of the Mullerian ducts. They dissolve. At the same time, testosterone stimulates development of Wolffian ducts into a male genital system. Part of testosterone is converted into dihydrotestosterone (DHT), which triggers development of typical male genitalia. The external tissue becomes the penis, scrotum, penile sheaths and foreskin. In a process lasting through late gestation, the brain is also masculinized by a metabolite of testosterone called estradiol.

In the absence of the SRY gene, typical female development begins. Without the influence of TDF (testes determining factor) and dihydrotestosterone (DHT), the undifferentiated gonads will form into ovaries at approximately three months of gestation. At the same time, the Wolffian duct disappears, and the Mullerian structures develop into the uterus, fallopian tubes, and upper segment of the vagina. The external sexual tissue becomes the labia major, clitoris, labia minor and clitoral hood.

Thus, the presence of XY chromosomes typically indicate a genetic male who society assumes will develop into a boy/man with characteristics and behaviors that are considered culturally appropriate. Similarly, the presence of XX chromosomes typically indicate a genetic female who society assumes will develop into a girl/woman with characteristics and behaviors that are considered culturally appropriate.

Although the SRY is usually found on the short arm of the Y chromosome, it can detach making for an XY female (the Y missing the SRY gene), or an XX male (the SRY attaching to the X). Thus, during meiosis, the SRY could cross over to the X chromosome. In that situation, an XX (considered female) child will develop into a male. When a Y chromosome has lost the SRY, an XY (considered male) child will become female.

It has taken science years to find the evidence that supports the argument that some people have a sex reversal in their chromosomal make-up. As previously stated, in such situations, a person who appears to be a woman actually has the XY chromosomal combination, and the person who appears to be a man has an XX combination.

In an attempt to explain some of the variations, the terms male and female have been used. However, those two terms limit our total understanding of gender, gender identity and gender expression. Transgender people remind us that gender, gender identity and gender expression are not fixed and limited. They are fluid and complex. Kate Bornstein, in *Gender Outlaw*, writes: "I know I'm not a man – about that much I'm very clear, and I've come to the conclusion that I'm probably



"We didn't start the sexual revolution but I think we gave it a good kick in the pants."
Christine Jorgensen

not a woman either, at least not according to a lot of people's rules on this sort of thing. The trouble is, we're living in a world that insists we be one or the other...."

A study that supports the influence of socialization on gender identity was conducted by Berenbaum and Bailey (2003). They studied the gender identity of genetic girls who were born with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH). Girls with CAH do not produce enough of the hormone cortisol. The lack of cortisol causes their adrenal glands to produce an excess of male hormones. As a result, these girls tend to have ambiguous genitals, and they usually undergo surgery so that their bodies look female.

The researchers studied forty-three girls with CAH, ages three-eighteen, and assessed their gender-typical behaviors and gender identities. Although they behaved in some ways more like boys, they self-identified as girls. According to Berenbaum and Bailey, this shows that prenatal hormones, while important determinates of gender behavior, are not the only factors. Social influences are also important.

The concept of gender roles refers to the set of behaviors that a particular culture deems acceptable for men and women. Our culture continues to assign two genders, male and female, with the expectation that men demonstrate "masculine" behavior, and women exhibit "feminine" behavior. Such a rigid definition of gender denies reality. Gender, gender identity, gender expression and gender roles are more complex, diverse and fluid.

In the 1930s, anthropologist Margaret Mead conducted studies on gender and gender roles. She assumed that societies would have similar definitions and expectations of men and women if gender and gender roles were considered biological. Men would, she reasoned, exhibit "masculine" behavior, and women would exhibit "feminine" behavior. However, she theorized, that gender roles would vary if they were influenced by culture.

Mead studied three societies in New Guinea (1963, orig. 1935): the Arapesh, Mundugumor, and Tchambuli. Among the Arapesh, both men and women had similar attitudes and behaviors. For example, both were caring, cooperative, gentle, and sensitive to other people. Behaviors our culture attributes to women.

Among the Mundugumor in southern New Guinea, Mead witnessed cannibalism. Both men and women exhibited insensitive, competitive and aggressive behavior. Behaviors our culture attributes to men.

In the western part of New Guinea, Mead observed the Tchambuli. Although they had different roles for men and women, the roles were opposite of our social expectations

for men and women. Men were emotional, submissive, and nurturing toward children. Women were rational, dominant and logical. Mead's observations demonstrate that gender and gender roles are influenced by society and cultural expectations.

The research and the individual stories are making an impact on our society and our culture. For example, sixteen states and the District of Columbia prohibit discrimination in private and public employment on the basis of gender identity and gender expression: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington, and Vermont. In the absence of state laws, a number of cities and counties have established non-discrimination ordinances prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression for both private and public employees.

Research and individual life stories tell us that gender, gender identity, gender expression as well as gender roles are determined by many variables, among them are prenatal hormones, genes and social factors. We also know that gender, gender identity, and gender expression are complex, fluid and diverse.

Transgender people have been known by many names. Among Native American Two-Spirit traditions, there is the Cheyenne "He man eh," the Lakota "Winke," and the Navajo "Nadle." Some other examples are the Madagascar "Skrata" and the Tahitian "Mahu." Among these societies, transgender people were highly respected, and their role was greatly valued. In their communities, gender variation and fluidity were accepted as part of life. As a society, we need to provide the freedom and opportunities for self-determination and self-expression. We must support the rights and dignity of all people.

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Snapshots from A Life in Transition



I thought, “Surely we can take this on.” We could become more aware of the intersections between freedom of choice as it pertains to a woman’s basic right to choose and freedom of choice as it applies to the lives of LGBT people, without forgetting that final “T”.

Life choices or body modifications for a Trans-person may come under fire, even from allies in the struggle for equality. Push-back from within the queer community came as a shock to me. There is a perception that some individuals expressed to me that transgender individuals are “selling out” by “becoming straight”. Sexual identity is often confused with gender identity, which can prevent trans-people from receiving the understanding and full inclusion they deserve within our congregations.

So what can we do?

We can all participate in educating ourselves and each other on trans-issues and the differences between gender, sex and orientation. Talking to one another and listening deeply are always great places to begin when it comes to providing a hospitable environment. Having a trans-person speak in each congregation can go a long way towards valuing each person’s story and voice. Hearing sermons on trans-issues and people makes a statement about the importance of this to all of our spiritual lives. Having a trans person invited to speak at the pulpit beyond their identity as issue moves from merely educating and valuing personal story to honoring the individual in their wholeness as an accepted part of that religious community.

We know from experience that there is power and healing in telling

When I came out to my friends as transgender some years ago, one question that friends often asked me was “When did you know?” I wondered, “What had they missed?” It seemed pretty clear to me that I was always male and had been born into the wrong body. For friends and allies who had come to accept and even celebrate masculinity in the female body, some were confused as to how I could have been so active in the lesbian and gay civil rights movement for years and then “change” my identity to transgender. The simple answer was “I am still me. This is about my spirit. My body is the house of my spirit.” Some who were not involved or invested in queer community questioned me as if I had suddenly lost my mind.

A gay male friend told me, “You lesbians are always inventing something new!” Some long-time lesbian friends were not comfortable with the thought of me modifying my body so that the outer appearance was congruent with my inner feelings. For all their talk about freedom of expression and choice, apparently it was not applicable when it came to me and my choices.

Since my coming out as a queer teen had been tumultuous for me, I was not looking forward to more of this. It was time to deal with a dirty word: transphobia. Some might call it, Queer phobia, and it is alive and well in our cities and towns.

Intellectually, we all must be the stewards of our own development-mentally, physically and spiritually, but in the face of injustices such as lack of protection in the workplace, we have a communal obligation to work together for communal change and development. Right now, my friends, it is looking like a long road ahead. I began to think about what I personally could contribute to the larger society’s understanding of the journey that many are on.

The Unitarian Universalist’s in New England, had been so amazing to work with during the worst of the AIDS epidemic that



our own stories. Our congregations and in addition, our Interweave groups nationwide provide a safe haven for those who are seeking community. At this time in history, we need one another more than ever. We have many who are wondering where they can go to find compassionate community, even in seemingly liberal locations where the perception is that the population is well informed and open minded.

The trans journey is not easy, speaking from personal experience. There are challenges that no one could have convinced me of before I chose to start telling others how I identify. I have a conservative Christian family that mostly does not understand my choices. During the mid 90's AIDS pandemic in Provincetown, MA, amidst a wave of death in our community, my church community became my chosen family. It was there that I began to see my potential as a gender variant person living in my own skin. It was there that I was called to community ministry and working with those who are historically or currently marginalized and in some cases, forgotten.

I recall my early work in AIDS ministry and a team of gay men who were my volunteers referring to me as one of the boys. This was a safe and welcoming environment for me, as no one cared about my gender identity: we were too busy dealing with life and death. AIDS ministry taught me to value every precious moment and not get caught up in the small stuff. Life is a gift.

We may assume that our trans congregants are doing OK because everything looks fine on the surface, but the world outside the walls of our congregations may not be very welcoming to us. Being a young trans person today almost guarantees that 75% of the peer population, may not be supportive. So when we ask you to listen or read or to help us educate, please hear this: your very action today may change a life. Right now, there is a Trans person in your community who is hungry for welcome. I am so inspired by how many of you are working on the front lines for equality; what a gift that is. Yet, I want you to know, especially if you are not normally someone who sees yourself as that interested or engaged in social justice, that inviting someone to coffee hour can be an act of profound welcome and justice. Making a place at the table for someone who may not have a community is grace in action.

We need one another on this journey. We need Interweave groups that provide a place to connect. We need our ministers to keep those who are marginalized in the justice conversations. We need to be courageous and speak the truth with love. We need to open our hearts as well as our wallets and make it possible for young trans people to attend our conferences and General Assembly. We need to reach out to the gender variant teenager with authenticity and care.

We need you to join us in the ministry of hope, as we turn our collective conscience to the work of honoring the inherent worth and dignity of all people.

With love & light,
Sun Principe
Vice President, Interweave Continental

Joining Interweave Continental

as an individual member is a great way to connect to other like-minded LGBTQ people and allies across the country. Your donations are tax deductible. Please consider an additional donation when you join to help us to provide financial assistance to those otherwise unable to participate in our activities.





The UU Fellowship of Poconos celebrated Angela's Womanhood. Angela is the happy woman in red, holding the bouquet.

The Entire Church Celebrates My Transition **by Angela Bridgman, Co-chair, Interweave of the Poconos** **Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Poconos, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania**

What is a beginning? A beginning is often difficult to pinpoint, even when we look back in retrospect. So, when did this journey begin, and where does it end?

We could look back at several significant events in our own lives and think: "This is a new beginning." As a transgender person, it is true for me. Did it begin with my surgery? Or, was that the end of the journey? Often, what we think of as an ending is really the beginning.

Did it begin when I began my "real-life test" - living and dressing full-time in the role of my target gender? This is part of the process required by The Benjamin Standards of Care for Transsexuals. The Standards of Care is named after the American pioneer of sex-reassignment surgery, Dr. Harry Benjamin. The Standards of Care, which ethical surgeons follow, requires, among other things, that the candidate live and dress full-time for one year in the role of the target gender, in order to be considered a good candidate for surgery. The assumption is that if a person can be successful in this period, then that person would most likely be successful post-op.

However, the Standards of Care do not address many of the problems faced by transgender people in today's society. There are numerous problems that create barriers to many who seek Gender Reassignment Surgery, or GRS for short.

The Standards of Care was established in the 1950's, long before the modern era of instant information, and permanent records stored in computers. It is the very thing which often stands in the way of many good candidates for surgery - including myself, at one time.

Consider my own situation: At the time I began my transition, I was working for a temporary agency in New Jersey. I had not yet transitioned when I accepted the position, but I was in the required period of psychotherapy, leading up to hormone therapy and the "real-life test." In the interview process for this job, I had disclosed all this information, and I was hired.

After a couple of months working, I had my name legally changed to my current name. In addition, I had all my work documents, including payroll and personnel files changed to reflect the new information. At that same time, I began Hormone Replacement Therapy. In short, nothing was kept secret from my employers. My situation was known.

When my therapist and I decided the "real-life test" could begin, I had just been commended on my job, and we both felt the time was right. My employers had constantly been asking me when I was to begin this real-life test. So, I went to them and said that my therapist and I both felt that it was time to begin this phase. My therapist also wrote a letter.

When they balked at this, I reminded them that I was a temporary employee. The only thing that should matter was whether or not the client company was satisfied with my work, and that they have no problem with my impending transition (which they did not.)

I was issued a key to a one-person restroom on a different floor of the building where I worked, and was told I could begin my transition. By this time, male employees had begun to voice discomfort with me using male restroom facilities (a discomfort I shared, I might add!)



When I showed up to work dressed in appropriate female office attire, I was called by the temporary agency, and ordered to go home for the day. I was told to appear at their office the next day (dressed as a male) for a meeting.

At the meeting, I was informed that I could not dress as a female until I had gotten the surgery! Do you see the conundrum this placed me in? I was not able to get the surgery until I had lived at least one year, full time (including working), in the role of my target gender. However, my employers were telling me that I could not dress in the role of my target gender until I had gotten surgery!

In the end, I was terminated from the agency because, as they said, "I did not seem happy there anymore." Their decision about my being unhappy was reached when I explained to them how their position created a problem for me, and how that presented a barrier to my receiving surgery.

I decided to take the case to court. Five years later, a settlement was reached in the illegal-termination case that I had filed with the Department of Civil Rights, New Jersey. I actually financed my final surgery on the proceeds of that settlement – poetic justice if ever there was any!!

However, employment still remains a serious concern and barrier for most transgender people. Often, it is not possible for transgender people to obtain proper identification in their chosen name and gender. This presents an immediate barrier to employment.

Another barrier presents itself with the pre-employment process where we are compelled to reveal all former names under which we have been known for the past seven years. One does not need to be a rocket scientist to know what is going on when Jill applies for a job, and she is forced to reveal that she was once known as Jack.

Even beyond the seven-year period (which I am now thankfully beyond), other pre-employment checks can constantly trip up a transgender person. Previous employer records may not have been updated, or previous employers may not cooperate with a request to change them. There are credit checks, Social Security Number checks (one is not issued a new Social Security Number when they change gender.) Often, these old records can appear, and show information that an employer really has no need (or right) to know. This information can (and often does) cause the current employer or the potential new employer to make negative decisions regarding hiring, firing, raises and promotions based on this information.

Outside of the professional realm, the transgender person also faces many problems. In social situations, one is often addressed incorrectly (wrong gender pronouns) and must

learn how to deal with such situations. Additionally, I personally found the transition process to be as much, or more, a process of un-learning as a process of learning.

We cannot fully appreciate just how ingrained many behaviors and reactions are within ourselves until and unless we attempt to change them. In social situations, if we exhibit a behavior or react in a way which does not match our outward gender appearance, it can create a problem. This often leads to the incorrect use of pronouns, and places a transgender person into a potentially difficult and embarrassing situation. To be successful, a transgender person must learn how to deal with these situations because they will surely arise.

I have found that it usually is best to simply ignore incorrect pronoun usage. I think it is best to act as if you did not hear it, or that it is no big deal. If you DO raise the issue, then it leads to a lot of embarrassing and stupid personal questions.

I have never ceased to be amazed at just how much personal information people feel they have a right to know about me, once they discover I am transgender. It is almost as if they no longer see me as a fellow human being with a right to privacy and civil treatment. Some have suggested that the biggest thing we MTF (male-to-female) transsexuals have given up is our so-called "male privilege." I would argue that the biggest thing many of us gave up was our HUMAN privilege.

As with many transsexuals, we do not feel that most people have any right – or need – to know about our transitioning past. Often, if I am directly asked about it, I begin by attempting to change the subject: "How about them Bears??" If questioning persists, I have the pat response that, as long as those people questioning me are not "on my dance card," then they have no need of that sort of personal information.

Sometimes, this is not good enough, and I have to get very blunt. At that point, my response is something along these lines: "Look, do you really want to know all about me? Then find out what books I like, what movies I like, what I like to do in my spare time. If you find all that out and still want to know more, then maybe I will tell you." This usually gets the point across. The fact is, in my view, anyone who believes that my transgender status is the most interesting thing about me, generally, is not a person with whom I am interested in cultivating a relationship, personal or professional.

Some relationships, however, cannot be circumvented so easily. Family and friends are often a source of support and comfort to most people. Often, we transgender people find that those who are supposed to support us in times of trouble, turn their backs on us when we need them most. The best



thing, in my view, about being transgender, is that I found out, really quick, who my true friends were. They were the ones who stood with me. The most bitter lesson many of us transgender people learn is that blood is not always thicker than water.

Often, our families turn away from us. Many in my own family did so. I have since rebuilt a relationship with my mother, who now accepts me as her daughter. It was a very long process, and it happened only because I wanted it, and continued to work at it. My father never did accept me, but he is now deceased. My brother, who is a Southern Baptist, has never accepted me, and is vocal about his belief that I am "hellbound." Needless to say, we mix as well as oil and water, and we do not speak with one another.

Recently, my nephew graduated high school and I was not welcome at the graduation ceremony, or the party afterwards. I was not at all welcome in my brother's home. This pain of rejection is one we all face, as transgender persons. As it was, my mother and I both traveled to Georgia for the graduation. While she went to the graduation, I found other things to do. After the graduation, we continued to Florida where we went on vacation for my 40th birthday.

In addition to my mother, I have a cousin in Illinois who is accepting of me. That is the extent of my flesh and blood

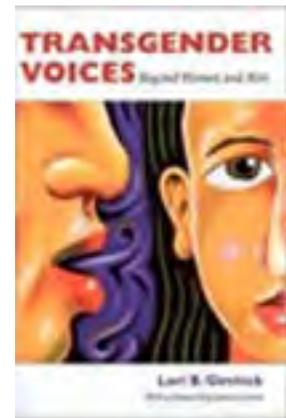
family...one cousin and my mother. Many of us have built "families" of our own...families not based on flesh and blood, but based on blood, tears, pain, suffering, and mutual support. These people are family to me in a way my flesh and blood family never can be.

These families are made of many people, from many areas of life. They are from work, social activities and, yes, even church. They are a support network I have had to build for myself over the years. Many people build such social support networks for themselves, but few ever build from scratch. I had to begin from a point of having absolutely no social support network of any kind. Few begin from a point where transgender people often find themselves – in a place where the normal support network we all hope to have to sometimes depend on turns out to not be dependable at all.

Church can be a very good place to begin to build these networks, and can be a place of solace and spiritual support. Too often, transgender people have been rejected not only by our family and friends but also by the religion we had been in most of our lives! Another support network that is supposed to be there in our time of need turns their back on us simply because they now know the truth about us. We are no longer living a lie.

Transgender Voices Review

Transgender Voices In this extraordinary book, based on 150 in-depth interviews, Lori B. Girshick, a sociologist and social justice activist, brings together the voices of sex- and gender-diverse people who speak with absolute candor about their lives. Girshick presents transpeople speaking in their own voices about identity, coming out, passing, sexual orientation, relationship negotiations and the dynamics of attraction, homophobia (including internalized fears), and bullying. She exposes the guilt and the shame that "gender police" use in their attempts to exert control and points out the many ways transpeople are discriminated against in daily life, from filling out identification documents to gender-segregated bathrooms.



By showing us a variety of descriptions of diverse real lives and providing a thorough exploration of the embodied experiences of gender variant people, Girshick demonstrates that there is nothing inherently binary about gender, and that the way each of us experiences our own gender is, in fact, normal and natural. ~ from Barnes & Noble



On the National Day of Silence hundreds of thousands of students nationwide take a vow of silence to bring attention to anti-LGBT name-calling, bullying and harassment in their schools.



Rev. Meghan Conrad Cefalu, Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Community of the Mountains



Some of you may already be aware that November 20th is international "Transgender Day of Remembrance." But for those who don't know about it, this day was set aside to memorialize those who were killed due to anti-transgender hatred or prejudice. Inspired by the desire to honor the life of Rita Hester, a transgender African American woman who was murdered in Allston, MA in 1998, communities around the globe gather annually on this day for public worship and vigils. It is being perceived as transgender – many more people are physically and verbally attacked each month. Not surprisingly, most of these cases remain unsolved. I offer you a small list of people to remember on that day. On September 10th, Gaurav Gopalan was murdered in Washing D. C. Gaurav was 35. In August, Camila Guzman was murdered in New York at the young age of 25 and Marcal Caermo Tye was shot and dragged to death in Forrest City, Arkansas. Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations President Rev. Peter Morales, said in a statement last year, "Anti-transgender violence is a stunning epidemic, embodying the darkest aspects of human nature. Perpetrators of such violence have succumbed to the moral plagues of fear, hatred,

and cruelty, turning away from love and compassion. Sadly, the victims of their murderous rage are too often forgotten by society at large." It may seem an impossible task to wipe out hatred and violence, but if we do what we can and start where we are we can make a tremendous difference.

I am very proud that our congregation, Unitarian Universalist Community of the Mountains, has made the decision to strengthen our ties to our local PFLAG chapters and together we are reaching out to the GLBT teens in our area. The high school students from several schools came together in our building last month to socialize in a safe place, free from bullying and harassment. They had a great time getting to know one another, eating pizza and playing games, and have planned to gather again.

Blessing and love,
Rev. Meghan Conrad Cefalu
UU Community of the Mountains

Foothills Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Maryville, TN

Living in a fairly conservative part of the Southeast, those of us involved in LGBT issues find that our numbers seem small for the work at hand. The congregation at Foothills Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (FUUF) has teamed up with the local Maryville PFLAG chapter which has brought together various groups (like FUUF) to stand together for a more visible presence in our community by coordinating our voices and efforts. Three months out of the year, FUUF shares half of its offertory with PFLAG (Maryville). We are an active presence at in an organization that offers outreach and education about current issues and legislation. We have had a presence at coordinated events such as the annual Transgender Day of Remembrance



(see photo of Clarence Smith of FUUF and Becky Lucas of PFLAG standing together during the 2011 event), Breaking the Silence, Diversity Prom, and the Gay Pride parade in Knoxville. FUUF supports the Tennessee Equality Project and as a congregation has signed the Human Rights Statement for equal access, opportunity and protection for all people in Tennessee. This year, we hope to begin the process of becoming an official UUA Welcoming Congregation.

The LGBT community celebrates another victory following an announcement that Verizon Communications has implemented a "gender identity or expression" protection to its non-discrimination policy. The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) urged Verizon Communications to adopt the policy after a five year effort of filing shareholder resolutions.

Check out full article



Letting the Flowers Bloom

Stephanie Mott is the Founder and Executive Director of Kansas Statewide Transgender Education Project and Chair of Kansas Equality Coalition

About six years ago, I turned 48 years old in the Topeka (Kansas) Rescue Mission. I was trying to live as a man and desperately fighting alcoholism. I have known from my first memories that I am female. I spent a lifetime denying myself more than can possibly be imagined. Telling people that they can't be who they are is like telling a flower not to bloom. It is like telling a bird not to sing, or the sun not to shine. It is a conscious decision to deny joy to the universe. For me, as a person who is transsexual, it is telling me not to be alive. From those dark days of homelessness and self-hatred in 2005, came the greatest of all possible miracles - I finally decided to accept myself as a woman.

Today, I am a little more than six years sober, and I have lived as a woman for more than four. Many amazing people have made this possible. Now, my life is dedicated to achieving equality for transgender persons and their families through education and political action. As the chair of Kansas Equality Coalition, I am working together with the Salina chapter of KEC, and with the Social Justice committee of the Salina UU, in order to pass an ordinance that will make it illegal to discriminate against Lesbian, Gay, Bi, and Transgender people in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations.

I am alive today in ways that would not be possible if I were still trying to be someone who is not me. The denial of self to transgender people is far more reaching than our unhappiness. It affects the lives of everyone who loves us, and everyone whose lives are touched by us. Acceptance and equality for transgender people make it possible for the flowers to bloom, the birds to sing, and the sun to shine.

Working for Equality in Salina, KS

Last October, I was invited to speak at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Salina, Kansas. As a transsexual woman, I have experienced the difficulties of not being able to be my true self.

There are amazing discoveries and growth that come with finding a world that allows me to be the woman of my soul. I share my journey as often as I can, more than 125 times now, and it is always an honor to find groups of people who choose to learn. The people I met at the Salina UU were warm and welcoming, as at most of my presentations, but this time it was different. After I had spoken, I listened to members discuss how it should not be legal to discriminate against transgender people.

A few months later, I received word that the Social Justice Committee of the Salina UU wanted to work to make that happen. Many members are also members of Kansas Equality Coalition, a statewide organization that works for equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bi, and Transgender Kansans through political action. As the chair of Kansas Equality Coalition, working together with the Salina chapter of KEC, and the UU Social Justice Committee, we are working to pass an ordinance that will make it illegal to discriminate against Lesbian, Gay, Bi, and Transgender people in Salina in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations. The entire fellowship is now involved. We have great hope that the ordinance will pass. The process has taken us through public hearings and educational forums, and is nearing the time when Salina City Commissioners will vote. It is a scene that is playing out in cities across Kansas. It started last October when a few heroic members of the Salina UU chose to learn more. Last October when a few heroic members of the Salina UU chose to learn more.

Update: March 14 - The Salina ordinance passed the human relations commission last night. Now it only needs to pass the city commission.

Stephanie Mott is the founder and executive director of Kansas Statewide Transgender Education Project and chair of Kansas Equality Coalition. She can be reached at stephanie.mott@k-step.org.



UUCA Interweave Chapter supports Atlanta Gender Variations

The Interweave Chapter at the UU Congregation of Atlanta (UUCA) has helped to launch a new support group called Atlanta Gender Variations. AGV is a support group for parents of children who are gender non-confirming. There is an increasing number of families who have discovered that their children manifest gender-variant or gender non-conforming behaviors. Often at very young ages, these children assert a gender identity that does not agree with the gender they were assigned at birth. As parents are confronted with this situation, they face many challenges in determining how best to support their children.

After attending the "Gender Odyssey Family Conference" in Seattle in August 2011, Jamie Strand returned to Atlanta with a desire to support these families. Seventy-five families, (parents and children) from across the US and Canada gathered at the conference to learn from professionals and each other. They discussed information about transgender children. They shared that transgender children are very insistent and persistent in their demands to wear the clothes they want to wear. They also want to play with the friends and toys they choose. Consequently, the parents are ing confronted with making life changing decisions on behalf of and in conjunction with their children. For example, Jamie met the mother of an 8-year old transgender girl. The mother was supporting her child's "social transition" by sending her child to school as a "girl." The child dressed as a girl. The mother asked the teachers to use the appropriate pronouns, and to let the child participate in playdates with other girls, etc. As you can imagine, this kind of parental support does not come without some very challenging situations: talking to the principals and teachers at the schools, handling bathroom issues at the school, team sports issues, other parents objecting, some relatives threatening to call social services, to name a few. As time passes, parents may have to deal with the issues associated with medical transition: hormone blockers to prevent the onset of puberty until the age of 15 or 16 when the child may begin cross-sex hormone therapy (testosterone for the girls and estrogen for the boys). Parents may also

have to deal with sex reassignment surgery at when their children are around eighteen when they leave high school. This kind of transition timeline is lived by many transgender children. Fortunately, the children are receiving more support by their parents and medical professionals than in the past. Transgender children look, dress and behave like gender normative boys and girls.

The "Gender Odyssey Family Conference" was the first time many of these children met somebody like themselves. Here is a link to an audio clip from NPR's This American Life radio program that touchingly describes one of these encounters: <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/374/somewhere-out-there?act=2>

For over four years, UUCA has been the home of a monthly PFLAG meeting, UUCA members Jerry and Babs Bell Hajdusiewicz facilitate, and many Interweave members attended. Believing that UUCA would be a welcoming place for the families of gender non-conforming children, Jamie approached Interweave and PFLAG leaders and asked for our support in launching Atlanta Gender Variations at UUCA. Jamie told us that there are only three such groups in the country (all on the west coast) and that through contacts within the Atlanta community she already knew several parents who were struggling with the challenges associated with raising gender non-conforming children. The families felt isolated and were in need of the support of other parents. Bringing parents together to support each other was the underlying premise of Jamie's proposal. With the endorsement of UUCA Interweave and PFLAG members and the encouragement of Rev. Marti Keller, plans were put in place. The first meeting of Atlanta Gender Variations took place at UUCA on March 3, 2012 with twelve participants in attendance! Beginning in April, childcare will be available for the families who attend the support group. For more information, contact Ms. Jamie Strand, strandjls@gmail.com or 678-232-0657. Jamie is developing a new website at <http://atlantagendervariations.org> - "Families with gender variant children supporting each other."

Welcoming Transgender Siblings Is a Crucial Part of Creating A Beloved Community

by Karen Johnston, Leader of USNF's Standing on the Side of Love group



Alice Wanamaker (center) with one of her two moms, Liz Rich (left), marching with the USNF contingent in the Northampton Pride parade in 2011.

Welcoming transgender siblings is a crucial part of creating a beloved community at the Unitarian Society of Northampton & Florence, as it is within the whole Unitarian Universalist faith movement. It is not work that can be completed in one sitting, at one adult education class, or through one friendship. It is a step-by-step process. It takes listening and changing, dropping defenses, and taking up the nonviolent arms that come with being an ally.

Here are some ways my beautiful congregation is standing on the side of love with our transgender sisters and brothers:

- Our welcoming statement, spoken from the pulpit before each worship service, is explicit that we welcome everyone: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and straight.
- Many adult and youth members of our congregation joined last November's Transgender Day of Remembrance vigil. A candle-light procession of over one hundred people passed through Northampton and ended with a program in our sanctuary. Two of the community event's organizers are members of our congregation—one is a transgender activist, while the other is an ally.
- One of our recent congregational presidents is an out and proud transgender woman, elected to her position because of her utter dedication to the denomination and congregation. She amazed us with her unending, welcoming energy, and her ceaseless enthusiasm. Her visible presence allowed us to live our welcoming values.

- Members of our congregation—including our then-president—served on the steering committee for “An Act of Faith,” an interfaith prayer service in support of transgender rights, which drew hundreds of attendees. Our congregation was one of the first co-sponsors of the event.
- During a recent OWL (Our Whole Lives) sexuality education class for 6th graders, the teachers opted to discuss transgender people, when the curricula offered the teachers the choice to include transgender in discussions on gender and sex. In addition to seeing this topic as necessary (not extra), the whole class took a “field trip” within the building to look at the signs on our restroom doors. They read, “Men and Transgender” and “Women and Transgender.” The responses of the children were: “I didn't know that.” and “Cool!” None of the kids had ever noticed or, if they had, they didn't know what the signs meant. Now, they proudly do.

Are there people in our congregation who don't understand the needs and issues that affect the lives of their transgender brothers and sisters? Yes. Are there folks who are uncomfortable with the whole topic? Probably. Yet, we continue to move as a small part of the wider Beloved Community, encouraged by brave transgender members and allies, echoed by our heterosexual minister, and inspired by our children and youth who are growing up with a sense of inclusion and belonging that few of us grown-ups ever thought possible.

Is there more we can do? Of course there is. There always is. This is the joy and the burden of living in a world ever moving in the direction of direction of justice.

- 38% of respondents who had interacted with the police reported harassment;
- 21% reported being refused medical care due to bias; and
- 15% reported being physically assaulted at work.

Despite these shocking statistics, black transgender people continue to transition and work towards their goals and dreams as active and visible members of our communities. They're not willing to settle for less than full equality, and neither is the Task Force.

One way you can help is to demand that the federal government include questions that identify LGBT people and their families in the Census. By making sure we're counted, we're providing activists and advocates with the data necessary to demand real change and equality.

Sincerely,
Rea Carey, Executive Director
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force An Important Message

A recent survey conducted by the Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality reminds us that transgender and gender non-conforming people face tremendous discrimination in the U.S. The combination of anti-transgender bias and racism means that transgender people of color experience even more devastating levels of discrimination on every single question we asked. And among them, black transgender people often report the highest levels of discrimination.

Of the black transgender respondents to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey:

- 49% reported alarming rates of harassment at school;
- 41% said they had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives, over five times the rate of the general U.S. population;

Message from the
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