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The staff of Interweave Connect  
welcomes your articles for our  
newsletter. Please note that the  
Interweave Connect Editors reserve  
the right to edit.



# Interweave Connect

October 2012

**Transgender Persons**

Dear Interweave Chapters, Members, and Friends,

For this issue, I am celebrating Lori and Aydene, who taught me all I know about transgender people.

Lori led forums at the DuPage Unitarian Universalist Church (DUUC) during which she said to all of us, "No question is too personal. All questions are welcome. Tell me what you want to know and I will tell you what I know about what you ask." Lori is a beautiful woman with a gracious gentle soul who shares a spirit that makes everyone feel loved who is in her presence. She transitioned male to female while a highly respected leader in the human resources department at McDonald's headquarters. She was a handsome man who transitioned to a lovely woman. She communicated wisdom, maturity, and grace. How lucky I was to gain insights into life as a transgender person from Lori.



Aydene is a spunky lady who transitioned male to female in her late sixties. Aydene served in the Army, worked in construction doing beautiful woodwork (among other things), and studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, producing awesome dramatic paintings. Aydene shared her story with the congregation at DUUC in a service that I organized to help fulfill our role as a Welcoming Congregation. I loved Aydene's artwork and remember being so happy when I felt a friendship grow based on something beyond Aydene's being transgender. Her reaching out to me was very special. We are similar in age (although Aydene would remind me that she is older than I), and have so much to share. I am missing you, Aydene! now that I am in South Carolina L Thank you for your friendship.

The point of my message is to remind our congregations to reach out to the transgender community. There is SO MUCH to gain. Go to the UUA website to find many resources. Read this newsletter and be inspired by the wonderful stories!

Interweave focused on transgender persons in our October Newsletter so ALL of you can plan for recognition of International Transgender Day of Remembrance in your congregations in November. ITDR was started to honor Rita Hester who was murdered Nov 28, 1998. A "Remembering Our Dead" project was launched in 1998, and a San Francisco candlelight vigil was held in 1999. The Trans Murder Monitoring project reports that in recent years around 300 trans people are murdered each year in 51 countries.

Nov 20, 2012 will be the 14th ITDR. From a moment of silence during one of your services to organizing a candlelight vigil in your community, your congregation can make a difference!

Go for it!!  
Maryka Bhattacharyya  
President, Interweave Continental

PS Thank you so much to those persons and congregations who became members of Interweave Continental during our recent and continuing October membership drive! We send best wishes to those congregations still working to secure funds for their membership. Please continue to pursue your journey. We need your help and appreciate your support!

# Multiracial Multicultural Page

## Finally Found My Tribe!

I think I've been a UU for a long time...but I just didn't know it.

I grew up with a non-traditional religious upbringing: my mother was disenchanted with the Baptist church of her youth, but remained steadfast in her reading of the Bible and her love of prayer. She prayed often – over us children, about issues in the world and our community, and for nearby and distant relatives. From her, I learned that questioning was okay, that women did not have to be second-class citizens in ANY area (she certainly was not) and that it was okay to not subscribe to a set creed, but instead to pull wisdom and truth from multiple sources.

From my father, I learned that religion could be intensely private. Daddy had a prayer candle with scripture and verses written all around it, and we knew that when Daddy was meditating or praying in front of that lit candle, we were not to bother him. It was “his time” and heaven forbid if you blew out his candle before he was ready! He prayed and meditated often – it's one of the enduring mental pictures I have of him. He did not attend church – ever that I remember – but he was, nonetheless, open to allowing others to experience God and spirituality in their own way.



As a child, I tried to attend church – my parents did not push me, and allowed me space to explore. Of course at 7 years old, I couldn't go very far, so my exploration started with the church right at the end of the block where I lived in Detroit. My nephew went with me, and we were enjoying the service, tapping our feet along with the songs when a very stern lady in the pew in front of us turned around and told us to “Stop making so much noise!”. That was the LAST time we attended that church, and indeed, I stopped attending church at all until later in my adulthood.

Fast forward a number of years, and now I was married to my high school sweetheart. After relocating to Connecticut, we began attending services at a church in a nearby community. The Pastor was known to my husband, and as his wife, I went with him to church. I learned a lot about the bible, about church life, and was relatively happy there, except...it seemed that women were treated as second-class citizens, and sometimes the message from the pulpit wasn't exactly affirming to women, either. I began to “cause trouble” – occasionally raising my hand when something the Pastor said rubbed me the wrong way – and my sense of discontent grew the more I read and studied.

It was during this time that I had my first experience with a UU church – the Unitarian Universalist Church of Norwich, Connecticut. We had been invited to Kwanzaa services there by a dear friend of the family, and by one of my husband's shipmates from the Navy. We attended the Kwanzaa service and found a loving and accepting group of people with a wide diversity of opinions and experiences – all of which were honored in the sanctuary.

My husband and I, along with our two children, found the Unitarian Universalist church to be a place of love and acceptance – a place where the inherent worth and dignity of every person was the foundation of their actions and purpose. It was the first place we'd ever experienced a Community Meal where literally everyone was welcome, and there was no requirement to affiliate with the church in order to receive help. It was the first church I'd ever attended where openly gay couples were welcome – not hidden in the back or spoken of in hushed tones – and that rang true for me. My own older brother experienced a significant break in his relationship with my parents because they could not accept his being gay. In this church, that was less likely to happen – and I loved that.

I will be a UU until I leave this earth – because nowhere else have I found that unconditional love is more than just a phrase to be spoken...in the UU church, it is LIVED every single day. We are not perfect – we are still human – but this denomination speaks to me in a way that the more traditional church experiences of my younger life does not. I have finally found my tribe!

by Dianne M. Daniels  
Former Vice President and General Counsel,  
The Washington Post Company



## Remembering the Lives We've Lost

This is the time of year when many of us begin thinking about the Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR), a day in which groups across the world hold vigils to remember those that have been brutally murdered simply because of their gender identity.

This year, we honor yet more victims of the horrific violence that has gone largely unnoticed. On September 10th, Gaurav Gopalan was murdered in Washington 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. These are just a few of the individuals whose lives were silenced this year by gender bias and gender hatred.

Last year, Unitarian Universalist Association President Rev. Peter Morales gave the following sobering statement:

“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. They leave behind friends, family, and an entire community who also feel targeted.”

“Unitarian Universalists have long dreamed of a society in which our most valued qualities are those of character. Now we must do more than dream.

As long as anyone is harassed or ridiculed, we must demand an end to the bullying. As long as anyone is judged because of their gender identification or presentation, we must insist on a higher moral standard. And if, God forbid, anyone is ever again physically harmed or murdered because of his or her gender identity or expression, we must rise up and seek justice.

We must put our faith into action, not just on this day of remembrance, but every day.

In memory of those who have been murdered, to all who feel their loss, and to all who still struggle with oppression, you are not alone. We are with you, standing on the side of love.”

I'm reaching out to each congregation again this year to ask that you consider holding a Transgender Day of Remembrance Vigil. A vigil in your congregation and in your community can transform your faith into action and bring awareness to the senseless murders that continue to happen in our country as well as abroad.

There are many ways to have a vigil. Light a candle for each person and read their names aloud—it may be the only time they are recognized as murder victims. Put their names on a star or on a placard and lay down in a public die-in for 5 minutes to create awareness about the murders. Please join with local LGBT organizations or consider hosting the TDOR in your congregation.

This year's names are once again being compiled at [www.transgenderdor.org](http://www.transgenderdor.org). There are also resources available through Standing on the Side of Love. Please feel free to contact Allison Woolbert at [allison.woolbert@gmail.com](mailto:allison.woolbert@gmail.com) if you desire help, information, speakers, or ideas for developing your TDOR Vigil.

Allison Woolbert

Copied from Standing on the side of Love,  
Oct 13, 2011

[Allison Woolbert life experiences](#)



# LGBTQ Ministries is Holding a Webinar on Transgender Identity and Inclusion

Wednesday, October 17 from 7:00-8:15 Eastern:

## Transgender Identity & Inclusion Webinar

This interactive, informative webinar, presented by Alex Kapitan of the Unitarian Universalist Association LGBTQ Ministries office, will offer a crash course in transgender identity and provide practical and concrete ways to increase your mindfulness and support of people of all identities and ways of expressing gender. Bring your questions and your curiosity and prepare to leave behind everything you thought you knew about gender!

Participants will gain a greater understanding of terminology, the experiences of transgender people, the ways in which all of us are impacted by gender norms and expectations, and how we can collectively increase our welcome and inclusion as liberal religious people.

This webinar will be accessible and beneficial for all--those who have zero exposure to trans identity and those who have knowledge and experience with trans identity.

Alex Kapitan is a transgender and queer-identified lifelong Unitarian Universalist with proud Midwestern roots. As the UUA's LGBTQ and Multicultural Programs Administrator, Alex supports the Welcoming Congregation Program and other resources that assist Unitarian Universalist congregations and leaders in increasing their welcome and inclusion of all people.

The "Transgender Identity & Inclusion Webinar" will be held on Wednesday, October 17 from 7:00-8:15 p.m. ET. [Fill out the form to RSVP.](#)

Note: If you live on the West Coast and are unable to attend the webinar at this time, please send an email to [love@uua.org](mailto:love@uua.org) indicating your interest. Alex will be doing another webinar on trans issues for a West Coast later this fall.



## Save the Date!



October 30, 2012  
8:30am to 4:00pm  
Bentley University, Waltham, MA

## Pastoral Counseling for LGBT Youth and Their Families

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Caitlin Ryan, Family Acceptance Project

Workshops - Attendees will have the opportunity to select two workshops from the following list:

1. Open the Doors and See All the People - Making Your Faith Community Loving and Affirming for LGBTQ People
2. Empowering the T in LGBT
3. Balancing the different needs and perspectives of your congregation, your denomination and yourself
4. Counseling Families of LGBT Youth - Panel Discussion
5. Difficult Conversations – Talking Across a Divide
6. Counseling Families of LGBT Youth - Discussion with Dr. Caitlin Ryan
7. What does the scripture really say about homosexuality?
8. Counseling LGBT Youth

[See the website](#)

# WAGLY

## West Suburban Alliance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth

### Explaining Myself

To ask how I know I'm transgender is to ask what the color blue looks like to me. It is not something communicable. How do you know what blue is? I could describe it scientifically; blue is when light travels in waves that have a length of 475 nanometers. I could describe where it's apparent; blue is the sky, blue is the ocean, blue is this Crayola color. Maybe blue is best described by its effect; blue calms people, blue describes sadness. But these do not identify blue. You can't explain blue to somebody who is blind.

Similarly, I cannot describe my gender identity in any way that would magically make you understand. Scientifically, there have been studies about the differences in male or female brains and maybe I have a male brain. Or maybe my brain received a lot of testosterone in the womb when my body didn't.

I could tell you when my gender is apparent to me and others. Every time I walk into a gendered bathroom, or check "male" on a form, write down my name, or tell people to call me "he".

Or is it how I feel? Is my gender defined as the late night panic attacks caused by my chest? Was my gender the leaping of my heart the first time I heard my mother call me her son? Is it my lifelong desire to dress as a boy, to wear khaki shorts and graphic T's? Or maybe it's my depression, my deep self-loathing I've barely escaped through years of therapy, the years I spent hiding in my own body, when my mind was the only world. But I don't think so.

There's something more to gender, and I don't think it's something we can communicate. Because gender is not

changeable with brain surgery, expression, or antidepressants. It is a tangled bar of yarn, and every time we think we've untied part of it we end up tying another knot.

Most people do not have to think about it as much as I have. Many people ask me how I know. How can one feel male or female? And I cannot answer. I cannot back up the part of my identity that's leading me to major surgery, that by expressing I turn myself into a target. And that is incredibly stressful.

When I'm around people who don't know anything about trans\* issues, I do not tell them that I'm transgender. It's a relief, sometimes, to just pass as an "average" boy full of testosterone. I don't have to explain myself, or tell people how I know. I get to identify as an artist, a pianist, a gamer, instead of just a transguy.

Expressing myself like this, however, is not entirely true to myself. Although being transgender affects less and less of my life, it is still there. I am uniquely aware of my gender in a way that most cisgender people are not, and I have a history not many people have. It does not define me, but it is part of me.

I do not wish to be forced to explain myself to everyone I know, but I also don't want to push away my trans\* identity.

I have found the solution is to surround myself with accepting, like-minded people. For me, these people are the youth and adult leaders at WAGLY and Umbrella. In these spaces I can be entirely me, expressing every part of my identity without being categorized as just a transguy or just an artist. Such a community allows me to be entirely myself, and I am extremely grateful.



James Dean Ingram paid \$155 to file a court petition to legally be known as Angela Renee Ingram. A judge rejected the request Aug. 30. <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/09/16/1132646/-Oklahoma-Judge-invokes-God-as-science> [see video](#)

beginning to be accepted as part of the “new normal” and to let members of the transgender community fend for themselves. As long ago as 2007, some of our most prominent activists and community leaders turned their backs on the transgender community in an effort to secure the passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act in any form, even one that did not include protections for transgender people. The pain and alienation caused by this ill-conceived exclusion lingers, I know, even now.

How, though, can I even begin to respond to this latest bit of outrageousness from one of my public officials? I’ll sign the petitions for redress and recall that are already circulating, and I’ll attend the demonstrations that I suspect will be taking place in the coming days, but I’ll also make a point to sit and speak to the transgender women and men whom I know personally, and I shall support them in every way that they call on me to do.

The “T” in BGLTQ is too often overlooked, as we assume that the imperatives of those of us who identify as “B,” “G,” “L” or “Q” are identical to those of the “T” community. I’ve taken classes and participated in workshops in which we have learned about transgender terminology and history, but it has mattered so much more to know transgender people on a one-to-one basis and to hear their stories in the context of an ongoing relationship.

From the clergywoman who ministered in the church that I attended when I first moved to Oklahoma to the political candidate whom I supported in an effort to unseat one of our most homophobic state representatives to the outstanding poet, novelist and activist whose master’s thesis I directed, transgender friends and colleagues have taught me to respect and to value their remarkably varied, courageous and creative lives. The least that I can do is to do everything I can to make sure that their identities are affirmed, their rights are protected and their lives celebrated.

J. David Macey, Jr., Secretary  
Interweave Continental

## Here We Go Again?

“Oklahoma judge,” the Sunday morning headline announces, “refuses to allow male sex-change candidates to have feminine names.” Here we go again, I think, while waiting for the toast to pop; one of my state’s public officials is once more attacking some of us and creating a moment of public embarrassment for all Oklahomans.

This time, an Oklahoma County district judge has denied petitions from two transgender individuals to change their names in order accurately to reflect their gender identity; in a convoluted ruling that invokes both genetics and Genesis, Judge Bill Graves argues that “a sex change cannot make a man a woman or a woman a man, . . . which the Court finds is sufficient in and of itself to deny petitioner’s request for a name change.”

The good news, if it’s possible to find a silver lining in this latest dark cloud, is that public opinion here in the Oklahoma City area seems quite uniformly to be against the judge and his ruling; even our conspicuously conservative daily newspaper, which not so long ago would not publish the words “gay,” “lesbian” or “transgender” except in the context of lurid crime reports, is presenting the ruling in tones of derision and dismay.

I’m always surprised when episodes like this one take me by surprise. In more cases than not, I find that my students, my colleagues and the people from just about every quarter with whom I interact on a regular basis treat my identity as an openly gay man as an unexceptional and not even particularly interesting fact of everyday life. It’s been all too easy of late for me to become complacent, lulled into a false sense of security.

I find myself wondering, early on this Sunday morning, whether this latest bit of malice has been directed against transgender individuals precisely because gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals have, by comparison, achieved some degree of acceptance into the mainstream of day-to-day life, even here in Oklahoma. People committed to drawing lines between specious categories of “normal” and “abnormal” are still going to do so, but perhaps the line itself is shifting so that I’m not always on the “other” side.

This, I reflect, is why it’s so important for those of us in the gay, lesbian and bisexual community to stand up and take notice when our transgender brothers and sisters are attacked. It’s tempting to take comfort in the (possibly deceptive) belief that we are



## The church was of great support to us

I wrote a piece for UU World, the magazine of the Unitarian Universalists, about Lina and me. It relates to how the church was of great support to us before, during, and after Lina's transition. And still is! You can read it here. I also, have an article on my blog called "She was the Man of My Dreams."

Lina and I belong to ERUUF (pronounced E-ruff), aka Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, in Durham, NC. We got to know the UUs when we chose a Unitarian minister to marry us. I've been a long-standing atheist, which is fine with the UUs. We take all kinds. We have no dogmas, but we do have guiding principles. I still have a hard time saying the word "church," but Lina and I do go on many Sundays, and we stand up and sing and sit down and listen to sermons. So there you have it.

Diane Daniel's blog, She Was the Man of My Dreams, about her wife's gender transition ([click her to see Diane's blog](#)).

## INTERWEAVE CONTINENTAL

With your support, Interweave Continental continues to actively work toward ending oppression based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Interweave Continental is involved in the following:

- Our **annual conference** and business meeting, "Convo," in conjunction with the Creating Change conference
- Events and workshops at the UUA General Assembly, including our **Annual Banquet**
- The Mark deWolfe Award, which is presented annually for lifetime devotion to Unitarian Universalist LGBTQ advocacy
- The Interweave Continental **Sermon Award**, presented annually for the best sermon in support of LGBTQ issues
- *Interweave Connect*, our **monthly newsletter**, which is emailed to over 1100 Unitarian Universalist Congregations, and many LGBTQ organizations within those congregations
- **Statements** to the public on LGBTQ issues and concerns

Our goals include:

- Effect **positive change** within UUA through our connections and collaborations with UUA leaders and members
- Represent a welcoming, liberal religious **voice** within local, regional and national LGBTQ communities
- Contribute to trans-formative grassroots movements that celebrate LGBT people and work to end all forms of oppression
- Support of **LGBTQ ministers**
- **To establish a Service Project in conjunction with and support of LGBTQ Youth**

**Interweave Continental** is made possible by the generosity of individual members and congregation Chapters. Please help us with this work.

## Welcoming Transgender

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 isn't something that can be done in one sitting, at one adult education class, or through one friendship. It is a step-by-step process. It takes dropping defenses, listening and changing.

Here are some ways my congregation is standing on the side of love with our transgender siblings:

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 member our congregation—one is a transgender activist, while the other is an ally.

One of our recent congregational president's is an out and proud transgender woman. She was elected to her post because of her dedication to the denomination and congregation. She amazes us with her unending welcoming energy and ceaseless enthusiasm. Her visible presence allows us to live our welcoming values.

Members of our congregation—including our president at the time—served on the steering committee for "An Act of Faith," an interfaith prayer service in support of transgender rights. Our congregation was one of the first to co-sponsors this event which drew over a hundred people.

During a recent OWL (Our Whole Lives) sexuality education class for 6th graders, the teachers opted to discuss transgender people. The curricula offered the teachers the choice to include or exclude transgender in discussions on gender and sex. The teachers felt the topic was necessary, not extra. As part of the learning process, the whole class took a "field trip" within our building to look at

the signs on our restroom doors. The signs read: "Men and Transgender" and "Women and Transgender." The responses from the children were: "I didn't know that," and "cool!" Some hadn't noticed them, and some 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 siblings? 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. We are encouraged by brave transgender members and allies. We are supported by our heterosexual minister, and we are 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 justice.

Ty Power  
Unitarian Society of Northampton & Florence, MA

## The Realities of Incarceration of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, and Transgender

September saw unprecedented national attention devoted to transgender people in prison. Controversy occurred when a Massachusetts U.S. District Judge, Mark Wolf, ruled that the Department of Corrections had to pay for Gender Affirming Surgery for Michelle Kosilek. Medical doctors for Kosilek stated that the surgery was medically necessary.

Unfortunately, most of the beliefs that people have about incarcerated transgender people are inaccurate. There were many transphobic statements by conservative Republicans and progressive Democrats alike. I have the honor of working with an organization, Black and Pink, that released a statement celebrating the decision. Despite the transphobic statements, the attention to transgender prisoners offers an opportunity for deeper dialogue and learning about the realities of criminalization and incarceration of gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, and transgender communities.

Unitarian Universalists have a special responsibility in instances such as this. We are theologically prepared to provide key support for Kosilek and for the needs of all people who are in prison; particularly those most marginalized. Our Unitarian theology reminds us that we believe in the oneness

of the divine, whether we understand that to be God or the interconnectedness of all existence. Our Universalist theology calls us to recognize that there is nothing sacred or holy about punishment. These legacies of our faith give us a unique voice to provide loving care and support to those held within the cages of the United States prison, industrial complex.

The realities of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia combined with institutional racism, classism, and other forms of oppression lead to a disproportionate number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender and gender nonconforming people in prison. Beacon Press published a book last year, *Queer (In) Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*, that articulates the travesty of the penal system on the lives of LGBTQ people. There is no easy and quick way to summarize the practices of criminalization that LGBTQ people experience, but a key point highlighted in the book states: "every identity, relationship, and household configuration that does not slot neatly into the heteronormative framework can be defined as unworthy, a threat to the moral order, and ultimately criminal" (pg. 25). Statistics show that LGBTQ people are criminalized and policed. It is especially true for low income/poor transgender women of color.

We are called to speak up, to end silence, and to speak truth to power. Black and Pink, the organization mentioned above, provides many opportunities for individuals, congregations, and community groups to get involved. We encourage people to hold letter-writing events to get to know people behind the walls. In order for us to build the beloved community we all dream of, we must do it with an understanding of those considered "other." Too often our LGBTQ moment issues revolve around those who help make our community appear more legitimate and we forget about or ignore those who experience some of the most violent oppression. As Unitarian Universalists, we have the faith responsibility to take up the call to justice, especially when it comes from places left behind by others.





Rev. Jason Lydon

Unitarian Universalist Theologian, Rebecca Parker writes:

A theology adequate to the realities of violence in our world must speak from the depths of our life experience. It must speak words of anguish and words of hope. The anguish is this: Violence can break our hearts and efface the sacred goodness of life in this world. The hope is this: Love, in its myriad forms, can recall us to life.

Our Unitarian Universalist theologies must include the truths of LGBTQ incarcerated people. As we are called back to love and to life, we will create justice in transformative ways. This is faith work, life work, and the ministry of love.

Rev. Jason Lydon,  
Unitarian Universalist Community Minister in  
Boston, MA

You can email him at [Jason@blackandpink.org](mailto:Jason@blackandpink.org)

## A Mother Opens the Closet Door

A Mother Opens the Closet Door

October is National Coming Out Month and our Two Spirits, One Heart book tour begins in the same month. Needless to say, I am filled with both excitement and some anxiety, as I share our family's story of transition. It is truly a month of coming out for the Aizumi family.

My oldest child was born female, but today he lives as a man. For twenty years, he lived in a body that confused him, made

Anastasia, a transgender woman incarcerated in Arizona, wrote an article for Black and Pink that is available in its entirety on our website. In it she writes:

When you are a transsexual you generally feel as if you do not belong. If you are a transsexual you feel alienated from both genders. The females do not accept you as being female and the males usually look at you as being a homosexual. You long for acceptance for what and who you are instead of what others perceive you as. You get so tired of constantly explaining yourself; who and what you are, the differences between you and a homosexual. About why you do not act like a 'man,' why you feel that you are a female trapped in a man's body... Being in a prison setting can and does increase these feelings a hundred fold. At times the inmates and staff can be so closed-minded. Even the mental health and medical staff that is supposed to know better. The continuous jibes, taunts, and ridicule are mind-boggling at times. And the more you want to get away from it the worse it seems to be.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender and gender non-conforming people in prison experience severe harassment, denial of access to medical treatment, sexual assault, and are disproportionately denied access to programs and parole based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It is through building relationships with incarcerated LGBTQ people that we as people of faith will be able to authentically engage in justice ministries. This article is an invitation to you, your Interweave group, your district, your congregation to get involved, get connected, and build the ministries we need. Black and Pink is available as a resource to anyone with questions and in need for more information.



Marsha and Aiden Aizumi

him question his worth as a human being, and brought him much pain. Aiden encountered years of harassment, especially in high school which caused him to become agoraphobic and suffer from panic attacks. He fell into depression and often thought that life was not worth living. It was a painful and trying time for me as a mother, but not nearly as painful as what my son had to endure.

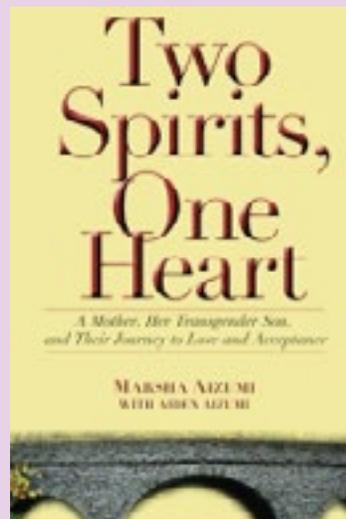
When I first began to write our story, my fingers literally flew off the keyboard as thoughts streamed easily and appeared to have no end. Like a player piano, ideas magically seemed to compose itself. I felt a great sense of release and freedom. I couldn't type fast enough. But then I began writing about our difficult years . . . the fear that would grab hold of me and suffocate me, the pain of feeling like a terrible mother who didn't protect her child, who didn't see the signs or saw the signs and didn't know what to do, so did nothing. My fingers moved hesitantly now. Would people see all the mistakes I made and judge me? I could no longer hide behind a mask of perfection. Everyone would know the kind of mother I was. My writing slowed down as I weighed every word, and I began to feel so vulnerable.

In the end, I decided to write as much of the truth as I could possibly write while protecting some of the most private parts of Aiden's journey. Those experiences would be his to share. This was my story.

People often ask me how I became courageous enough to come out of the closet when other parents, especially Asian parents, retreat further into a dark corner, lock the door, and feel so ashamed. Initially, I was one of those parents. I couldn't speak about my child with pride because I felt like a mother who had failed miserably. But one feeling stood out for me and carried me forward. I loved my child and no matter who he was on the outside, I knew the beautiful spirit that lived on the inside. I raised this child to tell the truth . . . and he was doing just that. I raised my child to love and respect himself first, so he could love and respect others. And so I slowly followed my son's lead, taking his hand, as he beckoned me to come out of the darkness and into the light. I was scared, but what I now see

is that if I hid in the closet, I would have never felt the joy, connection and love that exists today from this experience. Here are some words that come directly from *Two Spirits, One Heart*:

Finally, the most important reason that I have written this book is to serve as evidence of the fact that although this road we chose to take was not easy, it is filled with amazing experiences that I would never have been able to behold had I cowered in shame, fear, or anger. This journey has been healing. It has lifted my awareness and has opened my eyes to the wonders that were always around me, but I had failed to recognize. I walk in the world taking beauty and acts of love less for granted. I walk in the world recognizing acts of courage, compassion, and acceptance more often where once I moved through that world unconsciously. I may not notice every one of these incredible moments, but I certainly recognize and appreciate more of them than ever before. This journey with Aiden has made my life so much richer. It has deepened my appreciation for my husband and brought me closer to my younger son, Stefen. I am living the life I dream, and I am living it because Aiden had the courage to say, "This is who I am."



If any of you are interested in reading more about our story, *Two Spirits, One Heart* is now available at: <https://www.createpace.com/3952474>. The Kindle version will be available in 4-6 weeks. This book has been a journey of love, healing and hope. We hope it will bring you all the same and even more. . . .

Marsha Aizumi



CHARLOTTE N.C. — The 2012 Democratic Convention proved to be reflective of the country’s “melting pot” moniker in multiple ways. The number of LGBT delegates is historic and record-breaking: 486 in total from every state in the country and a dramatic upswing from the 288 on board for the DNC in ‘08.

Obama was the first President of the United States to have a closed-door meeting with transgender activists concerning transgender rights. Some of the Progress For Transgender People Made by President Barack Obama and His Administration:

1. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) added gender identity to the equal employment opportunity policy governing all federal jobs.
2. The Department of State revised the standards for changing a gender marker on a passport without surgery, making the process less burdensome for transgender people.
3. President Obama signed the Byrd-Shepard hate crimes bill.
4. President Obama signed the U.N. Declaration on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.
5. President Obama appointed the first transgender DNC member, Diego Sanchez.
6. President Obama conceived a National Resource Center for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Elders, funded by a three-year HHS grant to SAGE.
7. The Social Security Administration stopped its no-match letter policy.
8. President Obama banned job discrimination based on gender identity throughout the federal government.
9. HUD issued housing nondiscrimination regulations.

This is a video of the opening LGBT Caucus at the Democratic National Convention all of this progress is discussed. Activists are acknowledged. Victories are celebrated. And the fact that all of this progress could be wiped out with the stroke of a pen is clearly articulated. Speakers include Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius, veteran gay Democratic activist Rick Stafford, Brian Bond, a member of the Democratic National Committee, and Babs Casbar Siperstein the Democratic National Committee's first openly Transgendered member.

<http://www.metroweekly.com/news/?ak=7724>

video



## A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST UNDERSTANDING OF TRANSGENDER

A few weeks ago, I called the IRS help-line with a question. I was put on hold for forty-five minutes before I finally heard a live human voice. I explained my question to her. After probing a bit, she announced: "I'm going to connect you to the Department of Complicated Individual Issues." I stifled laughter, grabbed a pen and scrawled the department's name. The Department of Complicated Individual Issues! I love it!

Fortunately, my issue turned out to be easily resolved. I was tempted to say, "Well, I have some other complicated individual issues I'd like to ask you about. Since I have you, would you mind if I asked a few more questions?"

We all have complicated individual issues! We could really use a help desk to take these issues to! The reality is that there is a lot of complication in being a human being. Our bodies, our personalities, our minds, our experiences, our understandings: these are all enormously complicated. We are all constantly evolving. We are all unfinished works in progress. We don't live in a black and white world! We don't live in a world where everything is clear, where solid ground is always beneath our feet. We live in a world with an extraordinary diversity of human beings, not to mention breathtaking diversity in the natural world around us. "One-size-fits-all" just doesn't work in this world—not in nature, not in us, not anywhere. We are all unique! We are all complicated! Life is complicated.

Enforced social conformity is based on the fallacy that we are all alike—or at least

that we should all be alike. Uniformity, easy black and white choices: this is what underlies the desire for social conformity. Social conformity tries to simplify the complexity of human life. It tells us we should suppress who we really are if who we are feels different, out of the mainstream. If we're different—and all of us are in one way or another—social conformity proclaims that we should pretend to be something other than who we really are.

One of the tricks up the sleeve of enforced social conformity is giving us two narrow, mutually exclusive options to label ourselves. Either label is generally okay. But anything outside the two black and white labels is not acceptable. It's an either/or question, and there are only two correct answers. This is binary thinking. So you are either a liberal or a conservative. You are either a Democrat or a Republican. In recent decades, we Unitarian Universalists have expanded the options by one and formulated three mutually exclusive theological labels for our members: Humanist, Christian, or Theist. "What are you?" I've been asked more times than I care to count by other Unitarian Universalists. "Are you a Humanist, a Christian, or a Theist?" Much to my dismay, answering "Well, I'm kind of an interesting hybrid of the three" is generally not acceptable.

Gender identity—my focus today—is another example of binary thinking when it's conceived of as absolutely black and white. Are you male or female? Convention says there are only two possible options. What's more, our society has stipulated a correct answer to the question: whatever biological sex you were assigned at birth. But human life, as it turns out, is more complicated than this either/or question. First of all, not everybody is born with clear-cut genitalia. One in a hundred babies have bodies that differ from the standard male or female body. One in a thousand have ambiguous genitalia.<sup>1</sup> Helen Boyd writes about eight categories that are used to determine a child's sex. They usually line up, but not always.<sup>2</sup> The "not always" folks add up to

<sup>1</sup> Green, *Becoming a Visible Man* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004) p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Boyd, *Shes Not the Man I Married*, (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2007) pp. 131-132.

a fair number of people. So this question of which sex a person is at birth is more complicated than it appears. There is more variance than the either/or question allows.

Then we superimpose gender onto the equation. Gender adds role and identity into the mix. Role and identity characteristics associated with each sex are not necessarily inherent but are rather cultural constructs. They don't always fit a person, even if the physical characteristics match the sex assigned at birth. So for some people, the gender they are assigned at birth feels like the wrong gender. They feel like they don't match their assigned gender. Some others feel like they are neither gender or both genders or some hybrid of the two. And some others just aren't sure whether they're male or female or something else. All of these folks who don't experience gender as this black and white, you are 100% what you were assigned at birth are gender non-conformists. They're not non-conformists by choice. Simply in being who they are—in owning their own unique identity—they are non-conforming.

All too often, marginalization, ostracism, ridicule, and sometimes even violence goes along with this territory. While some societies have been more tolerant of gender nonconformity, our society has traditionally gone to extraordinary lengths to enforce gender conformity. The cultural assumptions that go along with assigned gender identity in this society are pervasive and present from the beginning of life—starting with the color of blankets and clothing to distinguish infant girls from boys since most newborns look androgynous. Those who feel dissonance between their assigned gender and their real selves often report feeling this dissonance very early in their lives. Imagine being a girl at age four and realizing that you really feel more like a boy, or a boy at age four who feels more like a girl. In this society, that would be really challenging given the relentless reinforcement of gender conformity.

It is important to understand that gender identity is not the same thing as sexual orientation. Sexual orientation has to do with whether you are attracted to

males, females, both, neither, etc. Sexual identity is your self-identification about whom you are attracted to. The umbrella term for folks who consider themselves different or opposite from the sex they were assigned at birth is transgender. Other terms embraced by some transpeople include gender non-conforming and gender queer. Many transgender folks prefer the simple label “trans.” Transgender includes many distinctive sub-groupings, such as transsexuals and cross-dressers. Some folks in these various subcategories don't embrace the label “transgender.” Some transpeople seek surgery and/or hormone therapy to correct their sex so it fits their gender identity. Others don't—some because they can't afford the cost of these procedures, others because they just don't want them.

The bottom line is that transgender is a huge category with a ton of variety. All too often, it gets reduced to one typically highly sexualized stereotype. Hatred and fear are often grounded in a reduction of a category people into a stereotype. Ignorance is always the handmaiden of hatred and fear. But the truth is that just as one-size-fits all doesn't work generally with human beings, it also doesn't work with transpeople. “Transpeople are like snowflakes,” Mother Flawless Sabrina says.<sup>3</sup> “There's no one way to be trans,” writes Jamison Green.<sup>4</sup> Everyone is unique.

Seeking to become who you really are in terms of gender identity is really important to a transperson. But it's not the only important aspect of their life. Jamison Green notes that his being transsexual is not the most important thing about him.<sup>5</sup> It's helpful here to remember that everybody has a gender identity. Who we are in terms of gender is an important question for everyone; having an identity that conforms to the societal norm generally takes less energy and focus, but it's not like those in this category have no gender or that it doesn't matter to them. I want to acknowledge and honor that transgender is an identity present in the Fellowship. And there are people in the Fellowship who are family members of transpeople. This sermon is not about other people. It's about

<sup>3</sup> Boyd, *She's Not the Man I Married*, (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2007) p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Green, *Becoming a Visible Man* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004) p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> Green, *Becoming a Visible Man* p. 43.

some of us in this room. It's also important to say that whether someone identifies as trans or not is not always visibly evident or widely known.

What causes someone to be transgender? Well, I don't see this as a psychological disorder. "Gender Identity Disorder" is currently included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. I fully expect that Gender Identity Disorder will go the way of labeling homosexuality a psychological disorder. So what causes transgender? It seems like there isn't any one explanation. Helen Boyd writes about the film, *Ma Vie en Rose*, in which God or Fate sprinkles transgender dust on babies and this determines the extent to which they are transgender. "The current research is not dissimilar," she dryly notes.<sup>6</sup> One person I talked to about the causes of transgender observed that transgender is one of the umpteen results of the mind-boggling complexity and variability of nature. The cause of transgender is being alive on this biologically incredibly complex and diverse planet. Ultimately, I really don't care what the cause is. I'm much more interested in figuring out ways to help people become who they really are, and in stopping oppression and violence against those whose gender identity is non-conforming.

So, what can the Fellowship do to become deeply and pervasively welcoming of transpeople? First of all, we can make this a community where it's okay for gender identity to be fluid and questioned. Helen Boyd writes: "Having only two boxes in which to place the numerous traits and habits and sensibilities and types of bodies restricts who we allow ourselves to be."<sup>7</sup> Let's not be a place where we allow a gender-binary understanding to restrict who we allow ourselves to be.

This work begins with the children in our Fellowship community. The process of suppressing a person's gender identity when it is non-conforming begins in childhood, amidst all of the "boys play with

trucks/girls play with dolls" assumptions. Within these walls and beyond these walls in the homes, schools and public places our children hang out, we can encourage children to play with what they want to play with and to be who they are. We can undermine enforced gender conformity in the ways we raise our children.

We can make the Fellowship a community where people are encouraged to answer the question "Who am I?" with openness and imagination rather than place them in the straightjacket of societal conformity. We can be a community where shame about being non-conforming and encouraging people to fake who they are in order to conform are banished forever. The best way to answer the question "Who am I?" is to answer it in a way that is real and authentic to who wearer. Nothing is more basic and important in the spiritual journey.

We can make the Fellowship a community in which responsibility is paired with self-acceptance.<sup>8</sup> As Unitarian Universalists, we affirm the free and responsible search. This is NOT an "anything goes" place. It's a place where we give you freedom to define yourself and your beliefs. Then we charge you to live in ways that are not only congruent with your self-identity and beliefs, but also in ways that minimize harm to others. This is really the whole premise of our sexuality program for teens, Our Whole Lives (OWLS). I'm happy to report that OWLS has been updated to present transgender information in the same open and thorough way it presents other information about sexuality. OWLS encourages freedom and self-acceptance, and it pairs these with responsibility.

We can work as a congregation to stop violence and other oppression against transgender people. Our society clearly has a problem here. In 2010, some 320 transgender or people suspected of being transgender were murdered in the United States. Of course incidents of violence that didn't result in death greatly exceed this

<sup>6</sup> Boyd, *My Husband Betty*, (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2003) p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> Boyd, *She's Not the Man I Married*, pp. 249-250.

<sup>8</sup> Boyd, *She's Not the Man I Married* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2007) p. 183.

number. Being perceived to be transgender is dangerous. Absent self and community acceptance, being transgender can also lead to self-inflicted violence: in a recent study, forty-one percent of transpeople reported that they have attempted suicide. We have work to do in our society to stop violence and other oppression against transpeople. The Fellowship can be part of the movement that says “No! We won’t tolerate this anymore!” We can begin this work by being a place where transgender lives are recognized. Part of what keeps this violence going is that it is hidden by our society’s refusal to recognize the existence of transpeople.<sup>9</sup>

As a Fellowship, we can do significant things to express to transpeople that we are a welcoming, safe community. This is why our signage on our restrooms indicates that transpeople are welcome to use the bathroom that makes sense to them. This may seem like a little thing, but it’s not. Figuring out which bathroom to use can be a source of great anxiety and fear for transpeople. The “wrong” choice according to the rules of gender conformity can result in arrest or violence against transpeople.

Another little but significant thing we can do is strive to use the pronouns and names preferred by individual transpeople. This isn’t easy—I’ve had to work harder at this than I care to admit. A great guideline for this is to use the name and pronouns indicated by how a transperson presents him or herself. If it’s not clear, then politely

ask. This is another place where it’s helpful to remember that everyone has a name and pronouns that they prefer—transgender and not transgender. It makes sense to me to try to use the names and pronouns people prefer.

We can make the Fellowship a place where it’s okay to talk about gender identity as well as sexuality. Too often in our society, these topics are consigned to jokes and porn sites. Spiritual communities are often the last place we talk about these things. But an important part of any person is our self-understanding of our gender and sexuality. We ought to be able to talk about these in a spiritual community where figuring out who we are is an essential part of the spiritual journey.

And finally, the Fellowship can be a place where we celebrate the commonalities that tie all of us human beings together, and where we celebrate the differences that make each one of us unique. Doing the latter helps us move from a place that tolerates differences to a place that accepts and celebrates differences. Being such a community would truly embody our belief in the inherent dignity and worth of all people.

I think our Fellowship has a sacred obligation to become truly welcoming of transpeople within and beyond our walls. I think we’ve made a good start. We need to keep on moving forward. It’s about living our beliefs. It’s about justice. It’s about building a diverse community in which the variety of human beings enhances each of our journeys. It’s about saving lives.

<sup>9</sup> Green, *Becoming a Visible Man* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004) p. 154.

Rev. Roger Bertschausen  
Senior Minister  
Fox Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

## ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’: Transgender Officers On Secretly Serving In The U.S. Military (video)



### Father of the Year Helps Dress-Wearing Son Feel Comfortable By Putting on a Skirt Himself Liberal:

Mr Pickert claims that when the family lived in the well-to-do Berlin suburb of Kreuzberg, cross-dressing was never a big issue 'After all, you can't expect a child at pre-school age to have the same ability to assert themselves as an adult completely without role model. And so I became that role model.'

'To this very day I'm thankful for that woman who stared at us on the street until she ran face-first into a street light. My son was roaring with laughter, and the next day he fished out a dress from the depth of his wardrobe. At first only for the weekend. Later also for nursery school.' Mr Pickert says his son's choice is now a subject of conversation for the whole town - and he feels proud of his own role in that. He added: 'What's the little guy doing now? He's painting his fingernails. He thinks it looks pretty on my nails, too.'

'He's simply smiling, when other boys (and it's nearly always boys) want to make fun of him and says: "You only don't dare to wear skirts and dresses because your dads don't dare to either." That's how broad his own shoulders have become by now. And all thanks to daddy in a skirt.' He added: 'What's the little guy doing now? He's painting his fingernails. He thinks it looks pretty on my nails, too.'

[check out report](#)



### National Geographic American Transgender



[Check out video](#)



## I'd Feed the Make-shift Body of Christ to My Friends

I was born to two people who both wanted to be Catholic priests. Since my mother couldn't be a priest, she did the next best thing—she married one. My father left the priesthood—but not the church—shortly before they married. My parent's brief, turbulent marriage ended while I was still an infant and I was raised by my mother, a fiery feminist, who identified as Irish Catholic, but rarely went to Catholic Church. She couldn't stomach church policies about contraception and the prohibition against women serving as priests.

This is the setting into which I was born and in which I was brought up as a female child. It was a setting in which religion and gender were already loaded topics before I ever started wrestling with them.

I was a good kid, bookish and quiet. I didn't get into much trouble, especially when I played alone. But, there were two games I played a few times with other kids that would incense my mother. One was playing doctor. The other was playing church.

To play church, I'd get out a tiny goblet my mother kept in the liquor cabinet. I would fill it with juice, soda—whatever was handy. I'd smooch Wonder Bread between my fingers until it vaguely resemble a communion wafer. I read random Bible verses over it in the most ominous monotone I could produce. Then I'd feed the make-shift body of Christ to my friends.

I don't know whether my mother's extreme discomfort with this game stemmed from the fact that I was tapping a raw nerve by

imitating my father in his role as priest—a role I'd never seen him play, or whether it came from a genuine sense that, despite my sincere intentions, it was sacrilegious. Perhaps it was both because, at age 8, I was not an ordained priest and because, as a girl, I couldn't ever aspire to become one.

Despite my mother's own misgivings about church doctrines, when I converted out of Catholicism, my mother didn't get it. She felt being Catholic was an ethnic, cultural part of our family identity. She definitely didn't understand why I would convert to Islam, which she viewed as even more oppressive to women.

Initially, I have to admit, I didn't dwell on gender as part of my conversion. In fact, I didn't dwell on any of the practical applications of the Muslim faith. I was drawn to the theology of Islam—the belief in one uncomplicated deity. I was captivated by the sheer poetry of the Muslim holy book, the Qur'an. And I loved that the Muslim insistence on using the Arabic word for God—"Allah"—is due to the fact that the word in Arabic can be made female or plural, rendering it by default male, but in reality genderless.

The idea of a genderless or all-gendered Creator felt empowering to me, as someone born genderless. Being born female, I could see myself as no more or less "created in God's image" than someone born male.

The conflict with my mother over religion was so heated; I left home the day I turned 18. It was more like escaping than leaving. Many queer youth face terrible conflicts at home when they come out as queer, but for me there was no other coming-out process that was anywhere near as hard as coming out as Muslim.

I married shortly after leaving my mother's house. The man I married introduced me to his conservative brand of Islam. In our social circle, the stark line between men and women, between men's dress and women's dress, men's roles and women's roles, put me clearly on one side of the line. This was strangely, a relief. I'd struggled with gender privately, constantly feeling like I was getting the "girl" thing wrong. I felt inexplicably like an imposter and had a bizarre fear of being "discovered"—as what, I wasn't exactly sure.

I had no language for my gender dysphoria, my sense that my actual gender was not the one I'd been assigned at birth. Dressed in feminine clothes and makeup, I felt like a clown. However, without them I faced scrutiny and criticism.

Among conservative Muslims, there wasn't really any accidental way to screw gender up. Entering the mosque, there was a door for men and a door for women, and if you forgot which one to use—someone would remind you. Any flaws in my feminine presentation were pretty well hidden by a long dress and a head scarf.

When my marriage ended, I came back to the U.S. and soon found myself in a full-blown struggle to come to terms with my sexual orientation and gender identity. Yet, I still felt these issues were personal and internal. I went back to dressing and acting as feminine as I possibly could. I married again and had another child. I shied away from the local, conservative Muslim community I'd been part of before I moved to Morocco, but I still considered myself Muslim. I started making connections in the LGBTQ community.

At one point, a lesbian friend who was studying psychology told me she hoped to work with Trans people. I thought she meant drag queens. She corrected me, saying she hoped to work with people who were born female but felt they were male. I had never heard of female-to-male Trans people. I'd certainly never seen one, not even on TV. Before I even had a chance to consider what I was saying, the words were out of my mouth. "That's what I am!" She had an unequivocal and immediate response: "It's not a problem."

That experience drove home the point that respecting the worth and dignity of every person is more than a maxim that hangs outside our UU door. It's a guiding principle that UUs try to live by—and it's one I embrace whole healthy.

The Director of Religious Education was right. The fact that I'm transgender has never been an issue. More importantly, neither my transgender experiences nor my religious practices of Islam are things I'm asked to check at the door when I come to the UU.

I've taught in the RE program many times, usually teaching the 7th grade Neighboring Faiths curriculum that introduces 7th graders to other religious traditions—including Islam. Last year, I was deeply moved when a member of my very first 7th grade RE class, who is now a senior in high school, contacted me because she was writing a paper about transgender experiences around the world.

The fact that she contacted me meant more than many invitations I've received to speak at conferences. To me, it was a concrete reminder that here at the Unitarian Society, I've always felt welcome to bring my whole self—my spiritual connection to Islam, my transgender experience, my complicated family that includes my creative, outspoken kids who have matured into wonderful young men. They have been nurtured by this congregation, my Jewish partner, an ex-husband and his partner who are now members of our UU. I don't just feel welcome—I feel valued. I feel valued for everything that I bring to the table, not despite it.

When I sit in the pews, I can guarantee that there is some significant way in which I differ from the person sitting next to me, perhaps it is belief or life history or queerness or family structure. And yet really? How different are we? When we gather here, to put our hands to work or engage our hearts in worship, those differences don't feel significant at all.

[An excerpt from his closing words at Northampton's Transgender Day of Remembrance.](#)

Karen Johnston, trans-ally  
Unitarian Society of Northampton and Florence  
Northampton, MA



intertwine. This is a “political” sermon in the broadest sense of that term; it is social and political, not partisan.

I know that some of our Unitarian Universalist congregations have been accused in the past of talking politics and pretending that it was religion. I do not wish to do that. Unfortunately, we live in a broken world. It is not perfect. There is much that needs to be changed in it. Many people are suffering. We cannot be religious people, claiming religious principles, without speaking to that brokenness and to the healing of it. We cannot claim to be religious people and ignore what is happening around us. At least, we cannot do that and still be true to our proud heritage as Unitarian Universalists.

Today, a spark has been lit and has burst forth into a bright flame. The movement for justice is taking huge leaps forward, justice for sexual minorities. I cannot ignore that movement. We cannot ignore it.

One of the greatest religious acts that one can engage in is reaching out a hand of welcome to an individual who is isolated and lonely, or to a group of people who are experiencing social isolation and scorn, and to bring that person or those people into the circle of love and inclusion. But it is not sufficient to act on an individual basis alone; it is not sufficient to be kind and loving solely in our private or congregational acts. Love and inclusion require that we work for social justice so that the whole life experience of people is one of having a place at the table. It is not sufficient to provide an isolated place of shelter; true healing takes place when one’s entire life is made whole.

Our Unitarian and Universalist movements have long histories of engaging in the struggle for human rights. And throughout the history of this nation, the struggle for equality has had to be ongoing because we as a nation have never lived up to our own best principles of liberty, equality and justice for all.

Today, there is a new struggle taking place in this nations. It is the struggle for the rights for sexual minorities. Some date this modern struggle to the Stonewall riot of 1969.

Beginning in 1970, just one year later, the Unitarian Universalist movement became actively involved in the struggle by calling for full rights for gays and lesbians. My comment

## What gender is God?

What gender is God? What gender is your soul?

I will ask you to ponder those questions in the back of your mind; I will return to those questions later.

My plan for this sermon had been to use those questions to urge everyone here to take part in the effort to pass the Transgender Equal Rights Bill that was up for a vote in the state legislature. Apparently the members of both houses of the Massachusetts legislature and the Governor realized that I would be preaching this sermon. Recognizing the immense pressure that would be placed upon them because of this sermon, they rushed to pass the legislation and Governor Patrick signed it into law just nine days ago! To save time, later this afternoon I will send Governor Patrick a list of other sermons I plan to preach. (The above is stated in jest!) The wonderful thing is that my sermon, rather than being a push for greater justice and love, now becomes a celebration of these.

According to the Human Rights Campaign, in the year 2011, nine people in the United States have been attacked and killed for being transgender. This is not acceptable; it makes the work of justice all the more important.

I plan to talk about definitions of the word transgender, and whether the various categories that fall under the heading transgender are “natural.” I, also, plan to talk about theology and Unitarian Universalist values.

I have several sermon styles, and this sermon is focused on social justice not personal spiritual matters, though these clearly

over the years has been that we came late to the struggle; given our principles we ought to have called for equality for gays and lesbians a hundred years before we did. However, though we came late, compared to other religions, we were relatively early.

The Office of Gay Affairs was established in 1973, changing its name several times over the years until it was named the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Ministries. We have made many efforts to improve our attempts to serve the people who fit in those categories, both within our religious movement and in society at large. Ten years ago, this congregation voted to become a Welcoming Congregation, a designation which recognizes those congregations that are welcoming to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Though we have reason to celebrate the fact that Massachusetts is now one of sixteen states that guarantee some equal rights for people who are transgender, there is more to do. Thirty-four states remain without protections. Although the federal government has made some effort, there still aren't federal laws to protect all the rights of transgender people.

Some of you may wonder what the word "transgender" means? Forgive me if I cover what may be basic information to those who aren't wondering. I have discovered that, like any label, the word "transgender" is both too limiting and too broad. The commonly known description is that a transgender people are individuals who are psychologically one gender and is physically another, so they are a woman in a man's body or vice versa. Some people stop using the term transgender if they have the surgical procedures that changes their body; some do not.

Being transgender and being gay or lesbian are not the same thing, but one does not exclude the other. One can be a woman in a man's body who is attracted to men, one can be a woman in a man's body who is attracted to women, or one can be attracted to both—or to neither. And the same is true of someone with a male body. That individual could be attracted to a women or another male, or both, or neither. It is not about sexuality. It is about self-identity and self expression.

There are also people with both male and female attributes, either physical or psychological. Some are happy with that ambiguity, or perhaps more accurately, with that mix. They are often included under the heading "transgender," though they might disagree with that label. And then, there are others who do identify as transgender.

For today's sermon, when I use the term "transgender," I make reference to all of those people who challenge our notion that individual human beings are easily categorized as either male or female. I use it for those whose gender identity or gender expression are "gender bending."

Some people have asked: "How can it possibly be 'natural' for a person to be transgender?" Many people believe that "natural" is being either male or female. In order to respond to that question, I want to quote portions of an article from the New York Times that was published on December 4, 1984.

When a school of reef fish loses its single male, the largest female begins acting like a male within a few hours and will produce sperm within 10 days. Some other species repeatedly switch back and forth between the production of eggs and of sperm during a single mating. Among deep sea fish that only rarely encounter potential mates, reproduction is often possible only if one changes sex.

Such opportunistic sex changes in fish, once thought to be a rare oddity, are proving far more common than supposed. Conversions from female to male are now known to occur in species belonging to at least 14 families, while conversions from male to female are known in eight families.

Nature is not willing to accept our assumptions about gender divisions as readily as we are. Instead, it poses challenges to our presumptions. Nature is more wondrous, more varied, more astonishing than we usually recognize. I find it fabulous that we will always have so much more to discover and to learn and to see. If that can be our response, if we can say, "that is fabulous," then all will be well with the world. When we decide that the wonder and the variety, and the astonishing are wrong, or evil, or threatening, we yield to

fear of the different. That is when oppression and injustice arise.

That is the source of all of our “isms,” racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism, all of them. When faced with the different, we too often respond with fear. We seek to ensure in our own minds that we are better than what we fear, and that what we fear must be controlled and contained. The fear of the different is what gives rise to the real evils in the world, the fear of that which challenges our limited visions of the world and the universe, the fear of that which challenges our view of what the world ought to be like if it just did things our way. That fear gives birth to hate, and hate destroys.

Love gives rise to wonder and awe. Love gives rise to more of itself.

In the beginning, I asked “what gender is God?” Most modern Jewish, Christian and Muslim theologians say that God (in this case, the God of Abraham) transcends gender. Throughout human history and across cultures, the original God or divine Principle is envisioned as either transcending gender or as androgynous. Hear the words from the New English Bible, the Book of Genesis: “So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Hear those words. The biblical claim that all of us, male and female, are created in the image of God. It is a claim of a god transcending gender.

Whether we understand various forms of gender identity and gender expression, or whether we can relate to them or not, is irrelevant to the question. As children of God, as children of the Goddess, as children of the Cosmos, or as human beings, people have the right to be treated with respect and dignity. People have the right to be treated as individuals with inherent worth. They have the right to be treated with justice, equity and compassion. Those are our declared Unitarian Universalist values. We claim those for ourselves, we owe them to everyone.

We are a Welcoming Congregation. Our hand of friendship and a seat at the table extends to all transgender people. They are welcome as full participants in our community. They are welcome as they are; not as sinners to be saved, not as sick people to be made well, not as pitiful outcasts to be changed but rather as whole persons welcomed into full community with us. We affirm their presence, affirm their membership, and affirm their inclusion in all aspects of our congregational life.

I stated earlier that I believe that the greatest religious act that one can engage in is reaching out a hand of welcome to an individual who is isolated and lonely, or to a group of people who are experiencing social isolation and scorn, and to bring that person or those people into the circle of love and inclusion. In calling ourselves a Welcoming Congregation, we have said that we are committed to doing just that. If we are to live up to the Principles of Unitarian Universalism, and our commitment as a Welcoming Congregation which includes being a caring, and nurturing community in which all are welcome, it is our responsibility to be part of a movement that is making our general culture more open, more accepting, more tolerant.

We are called to support those who seek to redress injustice and bring greater equality to our nation and to our world. We are called to act in the name of justice and love. Let us commit ourselves to doing so until every person, including each of us, knows in their hearts the words of the Unitarian Universalist Minister, Cynthia Landrum:

Beloved child of the universe,  
You are beautiful.  
You are whole.  
You are good.  
You are sacred.  
You are loved.  
You are made in the image of God.

Reverend David M. Bryce  
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