

Interweave Connect

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Don Hoppe, editor



FOR AULD LANG SYNE: "Our Long History With Interweave"



My partner, Al Usack, and I (Ed Kobee) have a long history with Interweave, going back to 1987. We've both served on the board, I was co-chair for a while, edited the newsletter for about 4 years, and wrote the *Convo* "How to Do It" Manual, and helped revise the by-laws. We both were instrumental in organizing the UU response to the 1993 March on Washington for LGBT rights. We had 3000 UU's from all over the USA participate in that March, including the full UUA Board. We are both holders of the Mark Dewolf award. Harry Hay spoke at the GA Interweave Dinner at which I received the Dewolf award. He was a true pioneer for gay civil rights, as was Frank Kameny, who died recently. We were fortunate enough to have met both men. Without their pioneer efforts, I would never have been able to come out of the closet when I did.

Al and I have just recently been legally married in DC, finally completing our wonderful Ceremony of Union which we held in 1995. We

are making progress, but it is slow!

We truly miss *Convo* – we probably attended about 20 of them. We feel we are getting too old to get involved with *Creating Change* and the NGLTF, and would love to



see us have a UU only *Convo* again – but I guess attendance has fallen off so much that it's no longer feasible. This is hard for us to believe – we had over 200 persons attending our *Convo* in 1992 at Paint Branch Church. We had thirty workshops, started informally on Thursday night and had special activities on Monday for those who chose to stay over.

We are now members of a small (about 100 member) Fellowship – the Manatee Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. It became a Welcoming Congregation well before we got down to FL (8 years now). We are quite comfortable there and very active – there are about 10 out folks there – we just had a table at the local Pride Day

celebration – the first table for the fellowship at such an event in a long time. We have started a new film series once a month, but the attendance has been small – but faithful. I'm not sure if we will be able to get enough folks together to get an Interweave chapter started. Part of the reason is the average age of the congregation is at least 70! We are working to get re-certified as a Welcoming Congregation, but Al and I are running out of the energy to carry this through. Would love to attract a few out young LGBT persons in their 40's and 50's to push this more.

Guess that's about it. You can read more about us in the recently published book edited by Susan Gore and Keith Kron, *Coming Out In Faith*. This is a wonderful collection of 15 stories from the lives of LGBT UU's who have found being UU helpful in the "coming out" process.

That's it for now, miss you all!

submitted by Ed Kobee

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CONVO 2012 / CREATING CHANGE

Convo 2012, the annual meeting of Interweave Continental, will take place again this year in conjunction with **Creating Change**. **Creating Change** is the National Conference on LGBT Equality put on by the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**. It attracts more than 2,500 people from all over the country every year. Presenters and participants come from all walks of life and include members of the business community, elected officials, students, faith leaders and staff and volunteers of non-profit organizations. The five-day program fea-

The National Conference on LGBT Equality Creating Change

January 25–29, 2012 • Hilton Baltimore, Maryland

tures over 250 workshops and training sessions (*including a workshop by Interweave: "RETHINKING LGBTQ PRIDE: PRIDE AS SOCIAL WITNESS"*), as well as four plenary sessions, and lots of networking opportunities.

Convo 2012/ Creating Change is being held in Baltimore, Maryland, and the Hilton Baltimore, January

25–29, 2012. Interweave's annual business meeting will take place on Saturday evening, January 28, at 6:30pm. Check the program booklet for location of Interweave's workshop and the Annual Meeting. Registration & further information at:

www.creatingchange.org

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Prayer for the Bullied

Spirit of Life,

May we realize the holy nature of kindness.

May we look into the faces of others and see ourselves.

And may we offer gifts of love, hope, and protection

To those who have been ignored or silenced or ridiculed.

May we speak up and speak out when we see others being mistreated.

And may we send the blazing light of encouragement and inspiration into the darkness...

Lighting the pathway for others...

As we echo the words amidst the often difficult journey:

Don't give up. It gets better.

It will get better.

May it be so.

Amen.

by **Mary Frances Comer**



Chapter Happenings

Woodinville UU Church: A Welcoming Congregation



WUUC has been a Welcoming Congregation since a unanimous congregational vote was taken in 1998 to be a part of this national program, which is dedicated to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for LGBT people. There are many opportunities for members to support this effort, such as attending Equality Day in Olympia and marching in the Pride Parade in Seattle.

This past year, WUUC had about 50 members and friends attend the Pride Parade. We also tried a new program called "Queerios" that was to be a staffed monthly meeting at the church for area LGBT youth. Regretfully, the staff person with the required connections and training had to pull back from the project after only one meeting and no qualified replacement has been identified to restart the project.

"Rainbow Café" in Carbondale

Rainbow Café, founded in September, 2000, operates as a joint ministry of the Carbondale Unitarian Fellowship and Church of the Good Shepherd, United Church of Christ. Over time, it has also developed a broad base of community support beyond the two founding congregations. Rainbow Café provides a SAFE SPACE social/support group for high school age gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth in Southern Illinois. It also welcomes those youth questioning their orientation and youth members' heterosexual friends.



Standing on the Side of Love in Kirkland & Seattle



Just before Valentine's Day Rev. Marian Stewart of the Northlake UU Church, Kirkland, WA and Westside UU Congregation, Seattle, WA Rev. Peg Morgan, visited the office of every legislator in Olympia who voted for the Domestic Partnership bill last year, the bill that stood up to Ref. 71. They gave them valentines from our children to thank them for "standing on the side of love." The legislators and their staff were very appreciative of the Thank You, particularly saying that they need to know that there are clergy who support gay rights.

UU Valdosta Receives Humanitarian Award

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Valdosta, Georgia, hosted the second annual "Interfaith Pride Service" in conjunction with the South Georgia Pride Festival in September. The invited speaker was Ms. Elke Kennedy, of "Sean's Last Wish." Elke Kennedy's son, Sean, died in May 2007, the victim of a hate crime, because he was gay. Ms. Kennedy spoke eloquently about how her son stood up for his rights and took care of his friends, and how his life was taken from us, ending with these words: "No mother should ever have to bury her child. No mother should ever have to lose her child to hate and violence. No mother should ever have to fight for justice for her child."



Congregation President Lars Leader (center) accepted the 2011 Humanitarian Award on behalf of UU Valdosta

Ms. Kennedy's appearance at the South Georgia Pride Festival and the Interfaith Pride Service was front page news in the Valdosta Daily Times, September 15, 2011.

The collection from the Interfaith Pride Service at UU Valdosta on September 18, 2011, was donated to "Sean's Last Wish." UU Valdosta also has hosted a Standing on the Side of Love "Rainbow Mixer" around Valentine's Day and is planning for the third annual event in February. For these and other LGBT-supportive outreach events, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Valdosta was honored in December by South Georgia Pride with the **Humanitarian of the Year Award** for 2011 (see photo, left).

submitted by **Carol Stiles**
UU Valdosta

LGBTQ Film Series: “XXY”

XXY is a 2007 Argentinean film that tells the story of Alex, a 15-year-old intersex teenager born with ambiguous genitalia, who has been living as a girl. She has been taking hormones to suppress her masculine features and increase her feminine features.

However, recently Alex has stopped taking her medication. The way her family copes with her condition and the ultimate decision that she must eventually make as she explores both her gender expression and her sexuality is a wonderful reve-



lation. The best line in the movie is when Alex’s father says, “I always thought she was perfect.”

The UU church in Eugene screened the movie for 35 people. After the movie no one wanted to leave; they wanted to stay and discuss this powerful film. I generally don’t enjoy foreign languages with subtitles. I like to watch the people and always feel that I must be missing something. But **XXY** is worth the effort!

submitted by Nisco Junkins
Interweave Board Member
Chapters Coordinator

Welcoming Congregations: A Letter from LGBT Ministries

The Welcoming Congregation Program began in 1990. Since then, almost 700 Unitarian Universalist congregations have been recognized for their work to welcome and include people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

Did you know? Today, 95% of all U.S. UU congregations with memberships larger than 150 are recognized as Welcoming Congregations, but only 50% of congregations with memberships of 150 or less are recognized. The Welcoming Congregation Program is for small congregations too!

Did you know? LGBT Ministries recommends that all congregations go through a Welcoming Congregation Program or refresher course every 5 years.

Did you know? A Welcoming Congregation Program isn’t just a workshop series. In fact, sometimes it doesn’t even include workshops! Each program is meant to be self-designed to fit a congregation’s needs and offer different kinds of opportunities to engage. The goal is measurable achievements around LGBT issues in education, congregational life, and community outreach.

LGBT Ministries is often asked why the idea of “welcome” focuses on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues. It’s a good question. “Welcoming” has become a sort of code word for religious spaces that are accepting of LGBT people. This is because historically, religious spaces have been hostile and condemning of people whose sexualities and genders deviate from the norm.

Thus, it’s not enough to say we accept all people into our congregations. In order to feel safe, LGBT people need to be explicitly welcomed. And so many LGBT people are searching for a religious home, having been told their entire lives that their identity is incompatible with religion. Unitarian Universalism is literally a saving faith for these folks, if they only know we are here and if we take intentional steps toward welcome and inclusion.

In order to be truly welcoming to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, we have to think big. Which LGBT people might feel most welcome in your congregation, and which might not feel welcome? Like all people, LGBT people have multifaceted identities. We are people of color, we are working class, we are differently-abled, we are immi-

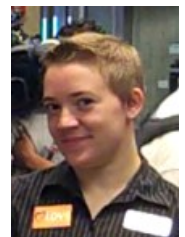
grants, we are children and youth and single parents and elders. Is your congregation intentionally welcoming to all of these LGBT people?

Being a Welcoming Congregation means knowing the work of being welcoming is never done. Our faith calls us to live a spirit of radical hospitality—only when we are truly open to the wealth of diversity in our world will the inherent worth and dignity of every person be affirmed with a large voice.

LGBT Ministries calls on you to deepen your congregation’s welcome, and we’re here to help. Bring the Welcoming Congregation Program to your congregation, do a Welcoming Congregation refresher course, or take next steps toward welcome around race/ethnicity, economic class, and/or disability. Check out www.uua.org/lgbt/ welcoming for more, or email lgbt@uua.org.

Alex Kapitan

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“The Long Road Home”

by Annette Marquis

an excerpt from: *Coming Out in Faith*

I guess you could say that my coming out as a lesbian was a religious experience. I had just turned eighteen and was in my senior year at a Roman Catholic boarding school when I was outed to my parents – by a nun. Sister Anne called my mother and reported I was involved in an “unsavory” relationship with another girl in my class. This was not welcome news to my devout Catholic parents.

I don’t know what caused my homosexuality. What I do know is that, from my earliest memory, I wanted to be a boy. From a very young age, I was recognized by others as someone with male and female characteristics.

By the time I made it to college, I was relieved to find other women like me. To be in my first community of lesbians was energizing, affirming, and most important, enlightening. I discovered Mary Daly and devoured her books, *The Church and the Second Sex* and *Beyond God the Father*. Daly’s theology opened the door for me to think about God not as a white-haired bearded man in the sky but as a life force for all that is good and holy. This life force could not be defined by gender any more than wind or rain could be. Soon after graduation, I stopped attending church.

Over a decade later, sitting at a Saturday women’s coffeehouse in the Unitarian Universalist Church of Flint, Michigan, I said to my life partner, “I hear they have a cool lesbian minister at this church. Maybe we should go check the place out tomorrow.” My partner’s assent might have lacked enthusiasm, but it was all I needed.

Something changed the day we attended that service. Maybe it was the lesbian minister. Maybe it was the brokenness I felt. Maybe it was my growing need for spiritual community. Maybe it was the breath of the Holy Spirit. Something drew me in and captured my soul.

I have been a UU for nineteen years now. In that time I have seen us grow dramatically in our acceptance of lesbian and gay people and, to a lesser extent, those who are bisexual and transgender. But that doesn’t mean the work is done.

For me to feel a congregation is serious about being welcoming, I look for two things: First, I look to see if they regularly speak out against discrimination in their communities and support attempts to secure civil rights for LGBTQ people. Second, I want to know they are teaching their members how to be more inclusive of LGBTQ people in their lives.

Changing laws or policies alone, however, isn’t going to end discrimination. We need to touch people’s hearts. This is the true meaning of the UUA’s “Standing on the Side of Love” campaign, doing the work of changing people’s heart and minds. It is also the work of our congregations, to challenge us to live by our shared principles and highest ideals to create Beloved Community here on earth.

Annette Marquis calls herself a ricochet Southerner, born in the North, raised in the West and then the South, educated in the North and the East, and now happily living back in the Southeast. She became a UU in 1991 and almost immediately became active as a lay leader. She was one of the founding members of UU Allies for Racial Equity and served as a JUUST Change consultant and Beyond Categorical Thinking trainer for the UUA. She has served as District Executive of the Thomas Jefferson District of the UUA since 2006. Annette lives in Richmond, VA, with her wife, Wendy, where they enjoy women’s basketball, hiking, writing, and new technology.



Coming Out in Faith: Voices of LGBTQ Unitarian Universalists

Coming Out in Faith: LGBTQ Voices in Unitarian Universalism, by Keith Kron and Susan Gore, is a collection of poignant testimonials illuminating the lived experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Unitarian Universalists. *Coming Out in Faith* also helps to raise awareness of Unitarian Universalism’s active role in promoting a vision of humanity that not only embraces LGBTQ people but actively seeks to learn from the unique strengths they bring to questions of personal faith and organizational vitality.

Available in the UUA Bookstore at:

<http://www.uuabookstore.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=1434>





Interweave Connect

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SAVE THE DATE!

**CONVO 2012/
CREATING CHANGE**

*Baltimore, Maryland
January 25-29, 2012*



GENERAL ASSEMBLY

*Phoenix, Arizona
June 20-24, 2012*