



Unitarian Universalist
Fellowship of
Central Michigan

Open Arms • Open Minds • Open Hearts

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UUFM Welcoming Congregation Initiative Summary Report to UUA Office of LGBT Ministries August 15, 2011

The Welcoming Congregation Initiative Begins . . .

On September 13, 2009, the UUFM Board of Trustees decided to devote the January 2010 all-congregation retreat to initiating the Welcoming Congregation process. Our intent was to educate as many members and friends as possible about the need to officially become a Welcoming Congregation as well as get a handle on how much knowledge we possessed collectively about LGBT people and issues.

Ad Hoc Welcoming Congregation Committee Forms

Shortly after the September 2009 Board meeting, a small committee formed for the purpose of planning the January 2010 all-congregation retreat. To ensure attendance by as many of the UUFM members and friends as possible, this committee implemented a process whereby each committee member was responsible for extending a personal invitation to all those on their retreat invitation list. To our knowledge, there was not a member or friend that did not receive a personal invitation to the retreat. This intentional and personal invitation process proved to be very successful . . .

“Living Our Faith” All-Congregation Retreat

On January 23, 2010, 47 of our then 54 members attended the all-day retreat (“Living Our Faith”) in which we identified the issues facing LGBT people at the local, state/national and international levels; we identified resources currently available to positively impact the issues facing the LGBT population; we brainstormed ideas for action in the areas of Education, Congregational Life, and Community Outreach; and we explored the fears the members of the congregation might have about engaging in the Welcoming Congregation process as well as the gains they might perceive from engaging in the process (*see attached photo gallery and Report of Results of Retreat*). At the end of the meeting, we voted to fully engage in the process of becoming a Welcoming Congregation and a Welcoming Congregation Committee (WCC) was officially formed.

WCC Planning Retreat

On Saturday, April 3, 2010, the now officially formed and newly expanded WCC met on the campus of Central Michigan University for a day long planning retreat. Eleven people attended this event (*photo*). Primary focus of the day was to review the results of the January congregational retreat process and create an action plan to educate ourselves, our fellowship and enact community outreach efforts (*see attached report for details*).

Welcoming Congregation E-mail List

In April of 2010, we formed an e-mail list of all those UUFCM members and friends who would like to be kept informed of action at the state or national level (phone calls, letter writing, e-mails, etc.) they could take in support of LGBT equality. People could choose not to be on the list and/or opt out of receiving the e-mail alerts at any time. Some issues addressed were ENDA (the Economic Non-Discrimination Act to protect employment for gay and lesbian workers), the repeal of DADT (the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy which denied gays and lesbians the right to openly serve in the country's military), hospital visitation rights, and inclusive bullying legislation (at the state level). Multiple organizations were included (although no requests for donations were forwarded): PFLAG, NGLTF, HRC, GLAAD, Lambda Legal, Courage Campaign, and Standing on the Side of Love. Alerts went out on an average of twice a month, although no record was kept to determine how many people acted on the alerts.

MI Pride Parade

One of our first community outreach efforts was to march in the June 11, 2010 annual Michigan Pride Parade held in Lansing, MI (*see photo*) and participate in the rally held that day at the capitol. Two members of the Welcoming Congregation Committee plus two other UUFCM members traveled to Lansing and proudly carried the UUFCM banner through the streets of Lansing to the capitol building.

Film Series

In order to better inform ourselves about LGBT issues, we hosted two film series – in Fall 2010 and Spring 2011. Films were chosen which would address various aspects of LGBT life – male, female, history, coming out, transgender, etc. The films shown and attendance at each were:

October 22-23, 2010	“Milk” – 5
	“Something about Jane” – 9
	“Transamerica” – 16
February 18, 2011	“Torch Song Trilogy” – 9
February 25, 2011	“If These Walls Could Talk 2” – 11
March 18, 2011	“The Celluloid Closet” – 9
March 25, 2011	“Serving in Silence” – 6

While there was much overlap in terms of who attended the various films (some attended all the films), 21 different people attended at least one of the films. After each showing, we had a conversation about our responses to the films and the new information/insights we had gained.

“Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts” Workshops

“Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts” is an interactive workshop designed to help participants identify the most common reasons people sit silent in the face of bias and stereotypes and enhance participant’s skills for speaking up against stereotypes without blame or guilt (see attached Ouch! flyer). Two friends from Central Michigan University, Dr. Ulana Klymyshyn, Director of the Multicultural Education Center, and Jon Humiston, Student Ombudsman in the President’s Office, are trained facilitators of these workshops and volunteered to present them for us. The first workshop was co-sponsored on October 7, 2010, with St. John’s Episcopal Church at their building with 25 in attendance (9 from our UUFCM), and the second was presented on March 3, 2011, at our building with 14 different members of our congregation in attendance.

OWL (Our Whole Lives)

We were able to provide the 7-9 OWL curriculum to ten of our teens during the winter of 2010. We had four trained leaders who presented the sessions on eight Sunday afternoons and early evenings, two leaders for the first four sessions and the other two leaders for the last four sessions.

We recognized the need to have another trained OWL facilitator, so we supported another person to be trained for the K-1 and 4-6 curricula.

Because we were unable to have consistent attendance for our young children, we were not able to offer the K-1 OWL program this past year. However, we have now scheduled the K-1 OWL program for our young children in the fall of this coming year (October and November) and the 4-6 OWL program for our young adolescents in January and February of this coming year.

Welcoming Congregation Workshop Series

We offered the Welcoming Congregation Workshop Series to our members and friends, and 20 people attended the majority of the sessions. The workshops were presented by two of our members – a heterosexual male and a lesbian and included a panel of LGBT people from our GLBTQ Services office at the university (Central Michigan University). The schedule was as follows:

Workshop Schedule

1. Introductions and Expectations – September 12
2. What We Know and How We Learned It – September 19
3. The Common Elements of Oppression – September 26
4. Gender Socialization and Homophobia – October 3
5. The Radical Right – October 10
6. Religion and Homosexuality – October 17
7. Experiences of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and/or Transgender People – October 24
8. Bisexuality and Biphobia – October 31
9. Transgender Identity – November 14
10. How Homophobia Hurts Us All – November 21
11. What Now? – December 5

At the December 5 meeting, we generated a list of individual, congregational and community actions we could take, many of which we have acted upon, led by the Welcoming Congregation Steering Committee (see *attached Results of Welcoming Congregation Workshop “What’s Next?” December 5, 2010*).

As one of the outcomes of our workshop series, members of the class presented a worship service on January 30, 2011, titled “Coming Out as Allies.” Using special music, a focused children’s story (“Say Something” by Peggy Moss), and “testimonials” from several members, the service moved us all forward in remembering our responsibility to speak up regarding LGBT issues (see *attached Order of Service*).

WC-Themed Worship Services

In addition to the 1/30/11 “Coming out as Allies” worship service conducted by WC workshop participants, we had three other Welcoming Congregation-themed services in 2010-2011:

October 10, 2010: “Welcoming All. Yes, This Means You!” - a sermon by the Rev. Dr. Nana’ Kratochvil

February 13, 2011: “Standing on the Side of Love” - presented by UUFCM Worship Director Dawn Daniels

April 17, 2011: “Love in the Open - Being a Welcoming Congregation” – presented by UUFCM Worship Director Dawn Daniels

(See *attached Orders of Service for details*)

The Laramie Project

Our worship service celebrating gay pride on April 17, 2011 was followed by a community potluck and a reader’s theatre presentation of *The Laramie Project*, a drama by Moisés Kaufman that tells the devastating and tragic story of Matthew Shepard and the impact his violent death had on the people of Laramie, Wyoming. Seventeen members and friends of the UUFCM Reader’s Theatre rehearsed for several months to present this

compelling and heart-breaking play to the UUFCM community. (Don't ask why not one of us thought to take any photos of this event . . . apparently we're somewhat photographically challenged. . .)

All-Congregation Retreat to Educate More of Our Friends and Neighbors

We also decided to do an all-congregation retreat that would be a mini-version of the Welcoming Congregation Workshop series. This second all-congregation retreat was held February 12, 2011. Based on recommendations from the original workshop participants, we presented and discussed some of the terminology related to LGBT issues, watched and discussed the video "For the Bible Tells Me So," listened to a panel of LGBT guests, addressed some of the realities on discrimination in Michigan, and discussed what each of us could do. Twenty-nine people attended the retreat, 19 of which had not attended the original workshop series (*see attached photos*).

Participation in Two State Conferences

In order to become more informed as well as to learn how to advocate for LGBT issues, three of us attended the "Standing on the Side of Love for Immigration Reform & LGBT Justice" conference sponsored by the Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network (MUUSJN) in Southfield, Michigan, on November 20, 2010. The conference acquainted us with the Standing on the Side of Love grassroots initiatives (we later purchased a banner and placards to use in our community and t-shirts and pins to sell to our members) as well as informed us about many of the state and national LGBT issues and how we might impact them.

On May 14, 2011, three of us attended the "Lifting Up the Voice of All-Embracing Love" conference sponsored by Inclusive Justice and a number of other organizations in Lansing, Michigan. The primary purpose of Inclusive Justice is to build an interfaith coalition for the human and civil rights of all in Michigan, particularly for LGBTQ people and their families. The purposes of the conference were to learn more about what it takes to create a welcoming faith community, what the issues are that confront the LGBT community, and how to work more effectively on these issues. The program included panels presenting what some faith communities are already doing; presentations on the current situation and importance of state and local initiatives; and workshops on advocacy within faith traditions and communities and advocacy at the legislative level. This information was helpful to us to affirm the efforts we have been making as well as to put us in contact with other people and organizations with whom we can work.

Participation in MUUSJN

Right after the November 20 conference in Southfield, we became participating members of the Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network LGBTQ Task Force which engages individuals from UU congregations and other groups in monthly Task Force conference calls to share progress and plan network advocacy actions. We regularly participate in the monthly conference calls that keep us informed as well as bring the information back to our congregation. MUUSJN recently received a \$12,000 grant to develop an Interfaith LGBTQ Advocacy Toolkit that can be used by UUs and other faith groups to be more welcoming and more effective in LGBTQ advocacy, and we are looking forward to helping develop that tool as well as utilize it ourselves.

Mid-Michigan Interfaith Coalition (MMIC) Formed

In November 2010, a collaborative effort was begun to form a more inclusive and more broadly defined ministerial association in the Mt. Pleasant area. Representatives from the UUFCM WCC met with Rev. Wayne Nicholson of St. John's Episcopal Church to compile an invitation list and draft a letter to send to potential participants. The first meeting of what soon became known as the Mid-Michigan Interfaith Coalition was held on January 12, 2011. The monthly meetings of the MMIC are currently hosted by and convened at the UUFCM and attended by representatives of eleven different Mt. Pleasant-area faith communities (*see attached materials*).

Human Rights Ordinance Initiative

On April 25, 2011, a meeting was held at our UUFCM building, initiated by our Welcoming Congregation Steering Committee, to begin the process of enacting a human rights/anti-discrimination ordinance in Mt. Pleasant (*see attached letter*). Forty-three people interested in social justice from all aspects of Mt. Pleasant attended the meeting, and from that meeting a group of eight people volunteered to serve on a steering committee to organize this effort.

This committee has met several times over the course of the summer, including once with Roland Leggett, the Field Director for Equality Michigan, and once with Roland and two of the current city commissioners, to do the groundwork necessary for the passage of the ordinance. We have developed a data base of influential people in Mt. Pleasant, looked at language for an ordinance, and are now in the process of building our profiles of people supportive of this effort. We are also now meeting with various other groups interested in making Mt. Pleasant a more inclusive community to educate them about the need for the ordinance inclusive of LGBT people as well as garner their support (*see attached minutes*).

Inclusive By-Laws

We began the process of revising our UUFCM by-laws in the fall of 2010, and it was very easy to change them to be fully inclusive of LGBT people. However, we also discovered that we had a great deal of work to revise all of our by-laws based on the recommendation of our quarter-time minister/consultant. Thus, we worked on them over the course of the year, and on May 15, 2011, the new by-laws were approved by the membership (*see attached by-laws*).

Welcoming Congregation Website Page

In April 2011 the UUFCM launched a brand new website that includes a page dedicated to the Welcoming Congregation Initiative - <http://www.uufcm.org/about/welcoming>. We are in the process of creating an archive for this page that will include all the documented and photographic history of this initiative. This page will also serve as the main page – going forward – of all efforts and activities related to being a Welcoming Congregation. We also hope to be able to drop the word “initiative” from the page title very soon.

Flying a Rainbow Flag

Based on a recommendation that came out of our last meeting of the Welcoming Congregation Workshops on December 5, 2010, the Board authorized the purchase of a large rainbow flag in January 2011 with the intent to have it displayed at the February 12 all-congregation retreat and then again at the February 13 worship service (*see photos*). At the March 13, 2011, Board meeting, it was passed unanimously that “...the rainbow flag be displayed on the exterior of the building every Sunday and on other times deemed appropriate by the Board.” This is what we have done since then, flying it from a flagpole on the front of the building at least every Sunday since May 1 (*see photos*), and, as well, displaying it in the glass foyer facing the street side at all other times.

Congregational Vote

On Sunday, May 15, 2011 at our Annual Meeting, the UUFCM membership – by unanimous vote – declared its intention and readiness to be affirmed as a Welcoming Congregation. We hereby respectfully request to receive the official UUA designation, fully cognizant of the responsibilities held therein. (Once again, we demonstrate our lack of photographic acumen . . .)