

# Welcoming Congregation – Live Oak UU Fellowship’s Action Steps

## Education

1. Offer religious education for people of all ages that incorporates lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer life issues.

We offered the UUA’s 6-session program, “Practicing Radical Hospitality,” jointly with the Berkeley Fellowship of UUs. We were very grateful that the Rev. Ben Meyers, then the minister at BFUU, invited us to participate. Both fellowships are small and it made for a much stronger program to join together to have more people and more diversity. One of our members, Richard Stomer (who is also a member of our Welcoming Congregation Committee) was one of the facilitators for the course. Note: Richard had also been a facilitator and member of the Welcoming Congregation team at his previous church. We were fortunate to have an experienced member helping guide us through this process.

Though we are a small, emerging congregation (with 39 members), we are blessed to have four members who are trained facilitators for Our Whole Lives (OWL). Two are trained to teach grades K-1 and 4-6; three are trained to teach grades 7-9 and 10-12. In addition, our part-time Director of Religious Exploration is also a trained and experienced OWL facilitator. We do not yet have enough children to offer the program to any of the age groups, but we look forward to doing it in the near future. We are also beginning a conversation with the Rev. Laura Rose, minister of the nearby First Congregational Church of Alameda, to consider offering the course jointly with them.

We forward and share information of value about LGBTQ issues from the news, about upcoming films (commercial and documentaries), from FaceBook, from other congregations and our District. We also subscribe to the national Interweave newsletter each month and forward it to our entire community.

2. Promote participation by congregational leaders, including the minister(s), religious education minister or director, president, moderator, and board members in the Welcoming Congregation Program.

Our Welcoming Congregation (WC) Committee was created by and is a formal Committee of the Board of Directors of the Fellowship. One WC Committee member is an immediate past member of the Board; one member is our Worship Chair and a member of the Nominating Committee. A representative of our Committee is present at and reports our progress each month at Live Oak Board meetings.

## Congregational Life

3. Form a broad-based Welcoming Congregation committee to design and offer programming and monitor progress.

Because we are a small congregation, we have a small, Welcoming Congregation committee, made up of three members of the Fellowship. One is an immediate past Board member and

currently serves as the Membership/Communications Chair for Live Oak, as well as volunteer administrator. One is the Worship Committee Chair and Worship Leader. And one is a newer member of the Fellowship. The Committee includes members of different genders and sexual orientations.

4. Adjust congregational bylaws and other relevant documents to include an affirmative nondiscrimination clause concerning membership, hiring practices, and the calling of religious professionals.

Our Fellowship approved a change to our bylaws (below) in the section on Membership per this advice. We also include a similar statement in our Orders of Service on Sundays.

#### SECTION A. MEMBERSHIP

The Fellowship embraces all people, including those of every religious background, any racial and ethnic background, any national origin, any educational level, any income level, any level and type of physical and mental development and ability, any affectional or sexual orientation, **gender identity or expression**, and any age. ...

Note: We do not currently have information in our bylaws regarding employees as we are a lay-led and volunteer-run organization. As we grow and add sections to our bylaws, we will include affirmative nondiscrimination clauses regarding hiring practices and the calling of religious professionals. In the meantime, we do welcome a diverse group of guests, including LGBTQ ministers, to our pulpit. And our regular contingent of volunteer Worship Leaders and Worship Associates also includes LGBTQ members and friends.

5. Use inclusive language and content as a regular part of worship services, and provide worship coordinators and speakers with guidelines on inclusive language.

Our lay Worship Leaders and Worship Associates are all aware and careful to use inclusive language. References to LGBTQ issues are included in homilies and reflections, and occasionally are the main topic of a service, e.g.:

- *Marriage Rites, Equal Rights, and the Religious Rights' 'Wrongs'*, delivered March 17, 2013 (<http://uuliveoak.org/past-services.htm>);
- *Practicing Love*, delivered June 19, 2011 ([http://uuliveoak.org/pdfs/worship\\_6-19-11\\_reflection\\_lgbt\\_past\\_future.pdf](http://uuliveoak.org/pdfs/worship_6-19-11_reflection_lgbt_past_future.pdf)).

6. For members and members' families, provide main worship space and ministerial services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer rites of passage, such as services of union, dedications of children, and gender-affirming ceremonies.

Sadly, our first such rite of passage was a memorial and celebration of the life of the partner of one of our members. The Rev. Ben Meyers worked with the partner and others in our community to create a wonderful service. And— because same-gender marriages are finally legal in California – later this month (January-2014) we will celebrate the wedding of two Live Oak members.

We also have had one service that included dedication of a number of our children. This service included children of all kinds of families, including, of course, LGBTQ families.

7. Welcome people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer in places such as the congregation's website, brochure, and orders of service.

From the very start, we have been very clear on our website and in our brochures that we welcome people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer. We do this explicitly in language as well as implicitly with photographs and graphics.

As part of the Welcoming Congregation process we did add a phrase clearly expressing our welcome to sexual and gender minorities on every Order of Service:

“Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Fellowship is a Welcoming Community that embraces people of any age, race, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, class, ability, language, or cultural background.”

8. Ensure that publications, public information, and programming reflect the requested status of all individuals as they see appropriate; recognize same-gender couples and transgender individuals in directories and other publications as they desire.

All members and friends are given choices as to how they wish their information listed in our church directory. As we develop other publications or programming, we will also recognize same-gender couples and transgender individuals as they wish.

## Community Outreach

9. Celebrate and affirm lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer issues and history during the church year (possible options include [Pride](#), [Transgender Day of Remembrance](#), and [National Coming Out Day](#)).

We actively participate in Harvey Milk Day activities in our community. In addition, we do recognize Pride, Transgender Day of Remembrance, and National Coming Out Day in worship services and thoughtful write-ups about them in our newsletters and on our Fellowship calendar. And many members do attend or participate in the San Francisco Pride Parade and/or Dykes on Bikes event (the day before the Pride Parade), jointly with other UUs from area churches.

We are planning a gathering on National Coming Out Day in 2014. We will invite our entire community to this event and offer an opportunity for LGBTQ members and friends to share their Coming Out stories with others. Several of us have attended such a gathering at another church and found it quite profound.

10. Participate in and/or support efforts to create justice, freedom, and equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people in the larger society.

We absolutely do what we can. For three years, we've co-sponsored [Alameda's Harvey Milk Day Celebration](#). We contribute funds for this city-wide celebration and have taken on several active roles, including providing a KidZone so participants and attendees can bring their children with them to the activities. We also provided the food one year. And we always have a table with information and a banner or two.

A few years ago, the city of Alameda was dealing with opposition to a new school curricula to combat bullying. An interfaith group organized a walk and rally called *Faith Communities Coming Out, Coming Together*. We had a sizeable contingent walking with this group and carrying banners. We then stayed for the speeches at the rally, where one of our members was introduced on stage.

**NOTE:**

We are a small lay-led community AND we rent space for worship services, meetings, and social events. Because of these limitations, we cannot offer ministerial services to people other than occasionally within our own community (e.g., for a memorial service). Nor can we offer space for meetings of events. We do hope to be able to do these things as we grow.

**FUTURE PLANS:**

- National Coming Out Day event in October-2014.
- We look forward to offering a film series for adults, featuring films with LGBTIQ themes (Milk; Southern Comfort; Priscilla, Queen of the Desert; French Twist; Beautiful Boxer, e.g.) followed by discussion and socializing.
- Contacting a nearby UU church with an Interweave chapter to see if Live Oak members can join them.