

Personal Reflection for 6-19-11

Since June is Gay Pride Month, we're making a special point in today's service to honor both the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender members of our community, as well as the straight people who love and support them.

As a gay man, I feel very blessed to be part of a spiritual community and a religious tradition that recognizes and honors my sexual orientation as a gay person. I fully realize that while a growing number of mainstream organized religions have embraced the cause of LGBT people, there are many religious denominations that still don't accept or who marginalize people whose sexual orientation or gender orientation are different.

When I reflect even a little on my experience as a gay youth and young adult growing up in the 1950s and 60s, I'm often amazed by how much has changed since then. Like most LGBT people, I grew up thinking I was the only person in the world like me. That, of course, would be all but impossible for a young gay person to believe today. All they'd need to do now is Google it.

When I was growing up, homosexuality was still considered a sin by nearly every Western religious denomination, a disease by the vast majority of doctors and psychologists, and serious crime by many levels of government. It was commonplace for people to be dismissed from jobs or evicted from their living places simply for being known to be gay or even being suspected of being a gay person.

For the first 24 years of my life, I desperately wanted to be someone other than who I was. Then, miraculously, I came to understand that there was nothing wrong with my sexual orientation. I marched in my first gay pride parade in Boston back in 1976 and plan to march with the Unitarian Universalist contingent in the San Francisco parade next Sunday.

While I'm happy to observe that a great deal has changed in the intervening years, much work still remains undone. Same-sex couples still lack the basic human right to marry in most states in this country and the vast majority of the nations of the world. LGBT youth are still routinely bullied and commit suicide in hugely disproportionate numbers. And transgender people still lack even the most basic of legal rights and protections.

In the face of so much work to do, I'm proud of the history of support within Unitarian Universalism for LGBT people. Our denomination has been in the forefront of the struggle for LGBT rights since 1970, when the Unitarian Universalist Association endorsed the first of many resolutions opposing anti-gay discrimination. The denomination has had an official office of gay affairs since 1973, while the first out gay person was called to serve a UU congregation in 1979. UUism has officially supported the rights of same-sex couples to marry since 1996. 1996 was also the year that the denomination began to actively reach out to transgender people, with the first openly transgender minister called to serve a UU congregation in 2002.

There is much for us all -- gay and straight -- to be proud of in this history and I have no doubt that UUism will continue to be a leader in both the struggle for LGBT rights and the movement toward full inclusion of LGBT people in the life of the denomination.

So as we look both back to the past and ahead to the future, I pray we may live to see the day when all couples will be free to enjoy the benefits of marriage; when gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth can grow up free of harassment, encouraged to express their sexual and gender orientations freely and openly; and when all of us are embraced for *how much* we love rather than *whom* we love.

May it be so. Blessed be. Amen.