



# Interweave Connect

Interweave Connect offers a network of communication that fosters the spiritual well-being and social responsibility of LGBTQA individuals and their Unitarian Universalist congregations.



July, 2013

## Interweave Continental Board Members

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### Letter from the President

Dear Interweave Members and Friends,

Having just returned from UU General Assembly in Louisville, my mind is filled with memories! General Assembly is expensive for us to attend, and participation is also financially costly for Interweave Continental. So, the events we were able to sponsor and experience feel like a privilege. Let me share with you the highlights that stand out strongly in my mind:

**Opening Banner Parade:** It was truly party time with all the congregations and organizations proudly marching through the grand hall to the lively music.

**Rev. Vanessa Southern's awesome sermon during the Service of the Living Tradition:** Rev. Southern gave us a compelling challenge to embrace change as times call for it with her memorable word. She told us to "be married to mission ... and date everything else!" (See article Rev. Southern's sermon on page 4)

**Our Interweave Banquet:** Standing room only in a space with 60 max. capacity! Thank you for all of your support!

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**The Interweave Continental Board welcomes your articles for Interweave Connect. All articles will be given consideration for printing in our newsletter. Please note that members of the Interweave Connect staff reserve the right to edit all articles.**

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Memorable moments from the banquet:

- Caitlin Cotter's Award-winning 2013 Sermon in which she celebrated the rainbow and all the spaces between the colors that represent a bit of all of us. In her sermon, she strongly embraced the term "queer" that frees us from so many kinds of binary boxes (see sermon, pages 5 - 9).
- Larry Kitchen's receipt of the 2013 Mark DeWolfe Award for long-term service in support of the LGBTQ community. A memorable moment was when Larry described his decision to move to Chicago from Michigan with his partner Ken after coming out to his father. Larry was to start his career again, and Ken was fired from his job on Monday after his photo from the weekend Chicago Pride Parade was published in the newspaper. Nothing stopped them in their life-long activism (see pg 10).
- Official election of board members via our annual meeting at the banquet, including our new members, Rich Charbonneau, Susan Gore, and Niala Terrell-Mason.

Unveiling Interweave's new Trans-Curriculum at our booth. A special moment was when Barb Greve referred a member of the trans community to our booth to address the question of whether Unitarian Universalism was approaching complex issues beyond, for example, what bathroom trans persons should use. We referred her to the insightful statement from the bio of our new board member, Niala Terrell-Mason. It reads: "Niala loves that our faith is at the forefront of the marriage equality movement. However, she also clearly sees that queer youth, people of color, and transgender folks have concerns and issues that take precedence over whether or not they can marry - issues like employment discrimination, hate crimes legislation, substance abuse, youth homelessness and sexual exploitation, violence against trans folk." Multifaceted trans issues are definitely important to us!

Reception in celebration of our LGBTQ Ministers, co-sponsored with the UUA (see pg 2).

Interaction with representatives at the UU Funding Program booth who notified us just before GA that Interweave Continental had received a significant

grant to apply our newsletter technology in order to expand our membership base over a 2-year period with the attempt to become self-sustaining. We are celebrating this funding and also feeling the burden of responsibility to live up to the ambitious goals that we set. We look forward to working with all of you to meet those goals of increasing membership!

Meanwhile, enjoy this July issue of Interweave Connect, in which we celebrate General Assembly and the many congregations that invested so deeply in their June Pride celebrations. Thank you all for sending your articles and photographs. We love to hear from you!

Yours truly,

Maryka Bhattacharyya

President, Interweave Continental



Maryka at GA, standing beside a life-like image of UUA President, The Rev Peter Morales (whose eyes appeared to follow us as we moved past 'him')!

## The Second Annual GLBTQ Ministers' Reception

The Rev. Keith Kron, Director of Transitions at the UUA, and Interweave Continental joined together for the second year in a row to host a reception at GA to celebrate the LGBTQ ministers who serve our congregations. Learn more about the special challenges that they face in their ministries in the June, 2013 issue of Interweave Connect, at <http://www.interweaveuu.org/images/stories/connect/june2013inter.pdf> The photos illustrate the celebratory atmosphere of the occasion. We are forever grateful for the special mission that these ministers fulfill for all of us. Thank you! Thank you!





## What Comes Next?

When I first heard that UUA General Assembly, our annual national meeting, would be in Louisville, Kentucky, I thought hot, sticky, conservative. I was immediately proven wrong. Upon arrival, I was surprised by the pleasant weather and the shuttle bus driver. He offered to share with us what he had learned from hauling UUs to and fro – that we value and respect others and the planet, and that doing good work in the world is important. Thus, began the goose bumps.

Being in a place with several thousand other UUs is always empowering, whether it's a workshop on Eco-Justice, a march for clean energy or singing "People Get Ready." One standout event this year was the sermon at the Service of the Living Tradition. Rev. Vanessa Southern of the UU Church in Summit, New Jersey, spoke about the cultural changes and upheavals that are altering our perspectives on religion and our religious institutions. Likening it to a first time scuba lesson when standing on the ledge of a boat that is rocking in the waves, she said, "we have awkward new gear strapped on our backs, and even though some old habits are working a bit against us, we are preparing ourselves to leap."

If our mission is just to maintain the status quo, says Southern, we're on our way out. We need communities that are alive to a variety of spiritual beliefs, serve directly, and are open to new ways to engage within and beyond our walls. As we

continue to focus on UU mission, we must be willing to question whatever gets in the way of serving and being alive to it. "Be married to mission," she says, "and date everything else." You can watch or read Rev. Vanessa Southern's challenging and inspiring talk in its entirety at:

<http://www.uua.org/ga/2013/worship/286915.shtml>

As we dive into this next chapter for Interweave Continental with our new board members, and a grant from UUA, let's remember we are not diving alone. We take each other's hands, walk to the edge and take that crazy leap together. It's what makes the scary possible. And so our next adventure begins.

Nisco Junkins

*Interweave Connect*

Member of UU Church of Eugene, OR



The Rev. Vanessa Southern  
UU Church in Summit, New Jersey



Alex Kapitan, David Macey and Caitlin Cotter

Each year, Interweave Continental conducts an award event for the best sermon related to LGBTQ issues and concerns. The 2013 winning sermon, “Spaces Between: A Theology of Rainbows,” was written and presented by Caitlin S. Cotter, a seminarian at the Starr King School of Ministry and the Director of Religious Exploration at the Berkeley, Calif., Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists.

### **Spaces Between, A Theology of Rainbows**

“Why are there so many songs about rainbows  
and what’s on the other side?  
Rainbows are visions, but only illusions,  
and rainbows have nothing to hide.  
So we’ve been told and some choose to believe it.  
I know they’re wrong, wait and see.  
Someday we’ll find it, the rainbow connection.  
The lovers, the dreamers and me.”

These words, first sung by Jim Henson’s Kermit in 1979, resonate in my being this morning. We gather here as a community of people who are more than categories, a people who know that we are loved—wholly and deeply—exactly as we are. We have gathered here today as Unitarian Universalists, as seekers, as dreamers, as people who believe in standing on the side of love. We can be a part of

finding the rainbow connection, of travelling over the rainbow to the land where dreams that you dare to dream really do come true. Dreams of acceptance. Dreams of diversity. Dreams of freedom and family, community and connection.

Nearly every week at Berkeley Fellowship we light our chalice while saying aloud together the words:

“Let love be the spirit of this congregation and service its goal.

This is our living covenant: to dwell  
together in peace,  
To seek the truths in life, and to help  
one another.”

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I wonder how this unison chalice lighting can challenge us to live into our potential as gentle, loving, righteously angry people.

Last Tuesday Evening, with members of the congregation of Live Oak, this fellowship started the Welcoming Congregation program. This program is focused on helping all participants become more welcoming and inclusive of people with marginalized sexualities and gender identities. More than that, it is about living into the words we say, about facing into the realities of our diversity and our potential to make our dreams of inclusion and transformation a reality.

If love is the spirit of this congregation, and service its goal, then there is a call to action humming just outside our doors. We covenant to dwell together in peace, but peace is not merely the absence of war, argument, or physical violence. Dwelling together in peace means working together for equality. It means honoring the experiences of all present in our congregation, community, and society. Seeking truths in life and helping one another is a call to discussion and respectful inquiry, solidarity with and support of each other.

We light our chalice each week, as Unitarian Universalists dedicated to justice. What can this mean for us? I know what this means for me, when I think about my commitment to the Welcoming Congregation program and Standing on the Side of Love movement. It makes me think about who I am.

I am a Unitarian Universalist. I am deeply invested in the spiritual work of examining my own prejudices, the ways in which I am not as welcoming, accepting or inclusive as I could be.

I am a Unitarian Universalist. I believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and I believe in the power of religious communities publicly declaring their hearts and minds open to all, no matter their gender or sexual orientation.

I am a Unitarian Universalist. I am determined to live my values in the world, to be present to the pain, suffering, and injustice present in our society and do what I can to make things better.

I am a Unitarian Universalist. I honor the glorious complexity and diversity of the human experience, the beauty of lives lived with integrity and love, of identities expressed with creativity and courage.

I am a Unitarian Universalist. I am covenanted to love, to service, and to peace, and I stand with



Interweave banquet was sold out and many of Ms Cotter's friends gathered in the rear of the room to celebrate her.



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those reaching for the dreams of equality and justice waiting for us over the rainbow. Or perhaps, waiting for us in the rainbow itself.

A few years ago, someone asked me to write about something I believed in. I thought about it for a long time, about what I held to be true and what was important to me as a person of faith, and I realized that for me it was quite simple. I believed in rainbows. By this I did not simply mean that I believed rainbows existed as an observable reality or that I thought they were pretty. I was not endorsing the traditional biblical interpretation of the rainbow as a reminder of God's promise that He would not again destroy almost all life by flooding the earth, either.

I meant that I believed in the spaces between. We are not just gay and straight, or male and female. We are a vast spectrum of experience, preference, identity, orientation, expression, confusion and experimentation. We are not just old and young, we are young and old together - Each of us carries wisdom and wonder. We are not a white man's country, or a white man's world, we are a land and a world of many colors. We are a rainbow, all of us a rainbow, and we are singing for our lives.

When I say that I believe in rainbows, I mean that I believe in wisdom and wonder, in questioning and certainty, in diversity. I believe that, as Unitarian Universalists, holding our rainbow flag proudly is not just important, it is vital. It can be for us a reminder that we are in solidarity with those who find themselves, not just in the spotlight, but in the spaces between. The spaces between genders, between recognized sexual orientations and preferences, between the cracks of what our society has deemed normal. For me that rainbow is a symbol of all those who transgress, of all of us who move between, who do not fit in tidy binary boxes, who are not simply one thing or another, who rebel against narrow minded hate.

I invite you to rebel, to stand up, to let your voices be heard. You are needed. It is not easy to be someone who challenges assumptions or blurs

boundaries. All youth who experience an identity or orientation other than what is considered "normal" face bullying and harassment, but all youth who identify as questioning or unsure of their gender or sexual orientation are twice as likely to face cruelty and social rejection.

Somewhere between 25 to 50 percent of homeless youth are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender. Most of these youth having been rejected by their biological families.

Those who identify as bisexual are significantly more likely to be suicidal than those who identify as straight, gay, or lesbian, though it is hard to gather data on bisexuality as it is so invisible in our culture-despite being the largest group of those under the LGBT label. Those who are bisexual also earn less than those who are out as straight, gay, or lesbian, and bisexual women, in particular, are twice as likely to live in poverty. The stigma against bisexuality runs deep, both among those who label themselves gay or lesbian and those who label themselves straight.





## Spaces Between, A Theology of Rainbows continued from page 7

It is estimated that one in twelve trans women in this country will be murdered, and that that rate goes up to one in eight if they are trans women of color. Transgender persons are twice as likely to be unemployed, have a nine in ten chance of being harassed at work, are frequently harassed and disrespected in public. They are statistically likely to face eviction, assault, denial of medical care, loss of relationship with their parents or children, and incarceration- based solely upon their gender identity.

Reading these statistics hurts my heart. They make me afraid. Afraid for myself, for those I care about, for all of us who are vulnerable and looking stigma in the face. They make me afraid for our communities and our society.

All those phobias - homophobia, transphobia, biphobia - these bog all of us down, squeeze flavor and freedom and authenticity from all of our lives. When any of us assumes we know another person's gender or sexual orientation we aren't just missing something about that person, we are missing something about ourselves. We are missing the chance to be curious. To be courageous. To be kind.

What would happen if each of us took the chance of being curious about ourselves and other people? Really curious? Respectfully curious?

In a number of places around the country now, particularly among certain groups of young adults,

it has become polite to ask a person what their preferred pronoun is, just as you would ask their name. It has become protocol to ask everyone what their preferred pronoun is.

I recently read the account of a self-identified, middle-aged cis-gendered, straight, white man who went to a gathering where he was asked casually, in the course of a conversation, what his preferred pronouns were. "Oh" he said, "he, his," and the person who asked nodded and continued the conversation. The man went home from the party giddy, feeling more seen and respected than he had in years. He knew that he could have said anything in that moment and been accepted, and it made him look at himself again in a new light. It made his gender identity feel less of a box, less of a restriction, because it had become for that moment something that was not assumed.

I had a moment like that myself, when in college I discovered the word "queer" as a reclaimed term for the first time. I remember standing in the stacks of the college library, leaning against the sharp edges of those metal bookshelves, and reading about this term that defied definitions and limitations, that united and transformed and encompassed.

Finding the queer movement was a lot like learning about the Standing on the Side of Love campaign. Both answer a simple question with

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profound clarity. What are you doing? We are standing on the side of love. What are you? I am queer.

I am queer. I am myself, one part of this vast interconnected rainbow of human existence and expression. I am not a label, I am a person, fluid and glorious and individual.

No longer an insult, this word sings in my bones of possibility and promise. It sings of the possibility of erased boundaries, of a world of embodied persons no longer constrained by the labels of sexuality and gender. It sings of the promise of solidarity, a promise to stand with each other in our differences, to stand united.

It is no mistake that the other term many of this us, this group of different people determined to stand in solidarity, use is the word family. We are family. Who is family? Anyone who says they are- anyone who chooses to stand with this us.

The queer movement declares that this word, the term queer, will no longer be a weapon flung against us. Yes, we are queer, all of us, each one of us. We are different, we are unique, we stand up to question the idea of "normal".

According to seminary professor Dr. Patrick S. Cheng, the word queer has three meanings. First, it serves as an umbrella term, a simpler way of saying lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, polyamorous, intersex, questioning, and anyone else who identifies as non-normal as well as those who are our self-proclaimed allies.

Second, it can be used as a verb, to mean a transgressive action. For example, I "queered" the play *Romeo and Juliet* when I produced and directed a version in which both *Romeo* and *Juliet* were girls. A couple "queered" *Star Wars* when the apparently male person dressed as Princess *Leia* and the apparently female person dressed as *Han Solo*.

Third, queer erases boundaries. It shines a rainbow light over all, declaring that "love is a many gendered thing".

The pride flag is not exclusive. Those of us who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, straight, asexual, pansexual, polyamorous, cisgendered, femme and butch and non-gender-conforming are a part of the spectrum of humanity. The rainbow is a reminder that we are a part of the family, that we are all connected in our vast diversity. That flag is an invitation, an invitation to rebel against labels that don't fit, against boundaries drawn too tightly, against arbitrary rules and harsh assumptions and oppressive hate.

We are gay and straight together. Almost all of us are both. We, each of us, are gay and straight together. We are man or woman, or man and woman. We are young and old. We are this land of many colors. We are, each and every one of us, complicated. Full of glorious complexity. Unique and Multi-faceted.

Our challenge as Unitarian Universalists, as a people of faith who believe in love, who believe in inherent worth and dignity for every person, is before us. I invite you to join us for the Welcoming Congregation program during our Tuesday Together time for the next five weeks.

May we embrace all that we are, all of our *Between Spaces*. May we stand on the side of love, living into our dreams, reaching for that rainbow connection.

As a prelude to next week's intergenerational service and potluck, please rise as you are willing and able for the *Standing on the Side of Love* anthem. The words to the chorus are printed in your order of service.





## Larry Kitchen Receives 2013 Mark DeWolfe Award

Activist and community builder Larry Duane Kitchen received the 2013 Mark DeWolfe Award at Interweave's annual banquet, which took place on Friday, June 21, at the Unitarian Universalist Association's General Assembly in Louisville, Kentucky. This award honors the memory of Mark DeWolfe, the first open gay minister to serve a Unitarian Universalist congregation in the United States or Canada. Interweave confers the DeWolfe Award each year on an individual who has made exceptional contributions in support of the BGLTQ community both within a Unitarian Universalist context and in the wider community.

Larry has spent the last three decades fighting oppression as an activist working on behalf of the BGLTQ community. Born in Madison, Wisconsin, and raised in Battle Creek, Michigan, Larry left home after coming out and experiencing rejection by his family and the loss of his job. Starting over in Chicago, Larry began working with local activists in the early 1980s alongside his partner of thirty years, Ken Palmer Kitchen.

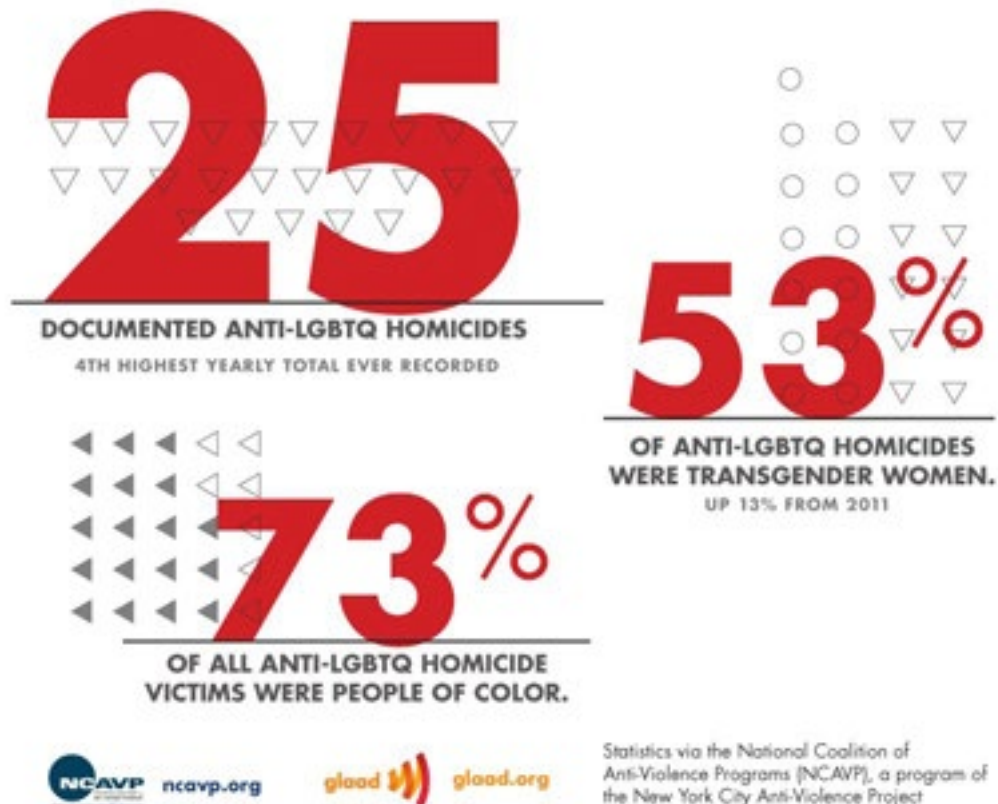
Ten years ago, Larry and Ken moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, where Larry is an active member of the

Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church. In Knoxville, Larry quickly became involved with the Knox County chapter of Tennessee Equality Project (TEP), a statewide advocacy organization that lobbies the Tennessee Legislature in support of BGLTQ Civil Rights. Larry and Ken regularly lead groups from Knoxville to the State Capitol in Nashville to meet with legislators and to advocate for BGLTQ equality.

Larry also works with Family Promise, an organization that provides services and support to homeless families in the Knoxville area, and he was the founding organizer of the Knoxville chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). In addition, Larry has held numerous positions at the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church, where he has chaired the social justice committee for the past five years. He is currently leading efforts to secure a comprehensive non-discrimination policy for Knox County employees.

Please join us in celebrating the life of Larry Duane Kitchen, an extraordinary person, so worthy of Interweave's 2013 Mark DeWolfe Award!

# HATE VIOLENCE IN 2012



## Hate Crimes (from the National Center for Transgender Equality)

Transgender people face well-documented and unconscionable levels of bias-motivated violence. This is especially true of young, low-income transgender women of color. The stigma associated with being transgender requires transgender people to maintain constant vigilance against sudden brutal violence. For years, transgender people have been murdered on an average of more than one person per month; many more have been assaulted.

**Interweave Continental has developed a  
Transgender Curriculum**

## **“Transfiguring Congregations” A New Transgender Curriculum from Interweave Continental**

Interweave (Unitarian Universalists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns) is pleased to announce the release of “Transfiguring Congregations,” a comprehensive new transgender curriculum developed by Julia Terry and Johnny Blazes.

“Transfiguring Congregations” supports the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Welcoming Congregation Program by helping individuals and congregations to learn about the experiences of transgender people in order to reduce transphobia and to increase awareness of transgender issues within our faith communities.

“Transfiguring Congregations” consists of four sessions in which participants will acquire basic information about gender identity and expression and apply that knowledge as they learn how actively to welcome transpeople into our faith communities.

“Transfiguring Congregations” engages diverse learning styles as it explores the intersections of gender and faith, examines what it means to be an ally, and prepares participants to build collaborative relationships to expand and enrich our Welcoming communities.

“Transfiguring Congregations” was created by Julia Terry and Johnny Blazes, in collaboration with reviewers Andrew Coate, Joss Greene, Barb Greve, Melissa Heckman, Alex Kapitan, Chris Page, Pauline Park, Leela Sinha and Dean Taylor. The development of “Transfiguring Congregations” was supported by a

grant from the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Unitarian Universalist Funding Program.

How much understanding do you and members of your congregation have of transgender persons and the challenges that they face in their daily lives?

How much insight have you developed into your own gender identity and gender expression? Where do you fit on the broad spectrum of humanity regarding these aspects of who you are?

Marriage equality is a more compelling focus of the LGBTQ community now than at any other time in our history! The time is NOW!

Transgender persons, however, have compelling concerns that often reach beyond whom they might marry, including employment discrimination, hate crimes legislation, substance abuse, youth homelessness and sexual exploitation, and physical violence.

This curriculum will help you to learn about the experiences of transgender persons, employing multiple approaches to learning, with the aim of reducing transphobia and increasing understanding within your congregation.

When you indicate on our website ([www.interweaveuu.org](http://www.interweaveuu.org)) that you want to implement “Transfiguring Congregations”, Interweave Continental will send the curriculum to you!

When your congregation has completed the curriculum and returned the accompanying evaluation form, you will receive an official CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION, honoring your congregation’s investment!



Julia Terry (right) and Johnny Blazes (left)

# UU Congregations Proudly Celebrate

Three Buffalo area UU churches marched in the Buffalo Gay Pride Parade! The UU churches of Buffalo, Amherst and East Aurora (all three are "Welcoming Congregations"), joined forces, showing our true colors! Banners and signs were made, and three vehicles decorated with rainbow colors, surrounded by 26 people!



Our Information table at the Vendor Fair after the parade.



# UU Congregations Proudly Celebrate



**Main Line UU, Devon, PA at Philly Pride**  
Gay Pride Fest with Main Line UU! Love, love, love (check out video)

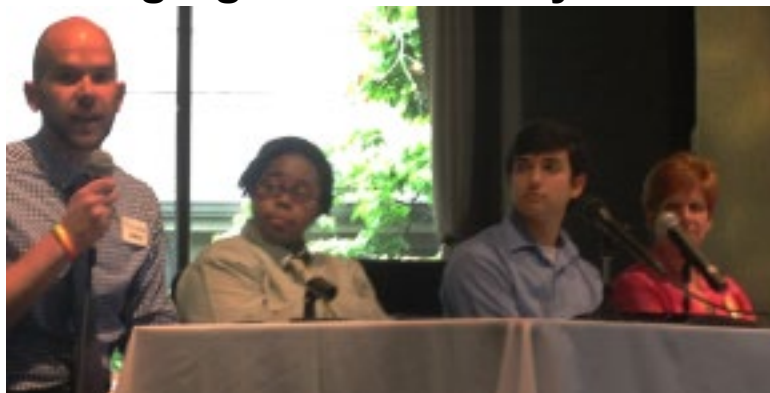
## Houston Pride Parade

UUs from throughout the Greater Houston area marched in the Houston Pride Parade! Under the leadership of Gail Wilkins, there was a UU float. The theme was “Come Dance With Us,” inspired by the annual LGBT prom at the Northwoods UU Church.

The float was a flatbed trailer with rails alongside. UUs danced as if they were at a LGBT prom. Benches were provided for those who wanted to sit on the float. In addition, two TV screens displayed a short video to onlookers.



# UU Congregations Proudly Celebrate



Advocacy Panel

Left to right are Andrew Shaughnessy of PROMO, Dr. Rebecca Frazier of the Gay Straight Alliance Network, Aaron Malin from Missourians for Equality, and Jill Aul of PFLAG.

## UU Pride in St. Louis

As an expression of our metro-UU commitment to be Welcoming Congregations for all people (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and allies), a special worship service was held at First Unitarian Church in St. Louis on June 30th. Representatives from all four Metro-Saint Louis UU congregations attended. The Reverend Krista Taves of Emerson UU Chapel gave a sermon about the spiritual task of being gatekeepers in the

world. Reverend Khleber Van Zandt of First Church, Alton, led the music, and other area UU ministers also participated (including Reverend Maureen Killoran, current interim at Eliot Unitarian, and our own Reverend Thomas Perchlik.) The service was broadcast live so that members of the Emerson and Alton congregations could watch and sing along from their own church buildings.

Because June 30 is Pride Day in Saint Louis, many people attended the Pride Parade after the service. We marched together to proclaim that “Love Wins” and that we are one religious community standing on the side of love and justice.

Mary M. Mamille, Member  
First Unitarian Church of St. Louis



Pictures from Nancy D. Spargo,  
Social Justice Coordinator  
Eliot Unitarian Chapel  
Kirkwood Missouri

Three ministers (Krista from Emerson, Khleber from First UU of Alton, and Thomas from First UU of St. Louis).



The North Shore Pride Parade in Salem, MA, June 29, 2013.  
Lois Markham, Chair, Social Action Committee, NSUU



Please make your congregation a Chapter of Interweave Continental. We need your help to continue this work.



# UU Congregations Proudly Celebrate

## Anti-Gay Blood Donation Policy

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Miami honored June's LGBTQ Pride month with a special worship service on Sunday, June 30th, focusing on local and national efforts to end the FDA's outdated and discriminatory policy banning blood donations by gay men.

Since 1977, the FDA indefinitely bans any man who has had sex with another male at anytime from donating blood. This regulation is based on outdated scientific data. It inaccurately identifies sexual identity/orientation as high risk rather than identifying specific behaviors.

Luigi Ferrer, member of the congregation's board of trustees and director at Prideline Youth Services, and congregation member David Traupman led the service. There were readings, songs, and messages that lifted up the Unitarian Universalist principles of "the inherent worth and dignity of every person" and "justice, equity, and compassion in human relations," as well as the congregation's commitment to speak out when the rights and dignity of LGBTQ people are at stake. Featured guest speakers included Blake Lynch and Brett Donnelly. They are the co-founders of Banned4Life, a national advocacy group based in Orlando working to raise awareness about the FDA policy, and to promote the importance of donating blood by encouraging eligible donors to donate blood in place of those who are Banned4Life.

A coalition of additional South Florida LGBTQ organizations, including SAVE Dade and Unity Coalition met after the service with congregants to further explore ways to build a coalition to maximize efforts to advocate for changing the FDA policy. Many ideas related to building grassroots support, forming an interfaith coalition, hosting days of action, and lobbying medical and legislative partners to join advocacy efforts were discussed.

\* \* \*

The congregation currently hosts a bloodmobile on its campus, and this service was presented by a Lift the Ban task force appointed by the board of trustees in conjunction with the Social Justice and Welcoming Congregation committees to educate the congregation and develop an action plan for advocacy. A straw poll was distributed to attendees

inviting input as to whether or not to continue hosting the bloodmobile on campus. The task force plans on presenting a plan to the board with actions being taken this fall.

Rev. Wendy Pantoja, Minister  
David Jacobs, Board of Trustees President  
uumia.org



(L to R): Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Miami board member Luigi Ferrer, Banned4Life co-founders Brett Donnelly and Blake Lynch, and service coordinator David Traupman.



L to R): Three generations of Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Miami members join in the Banned4Life effort: Andrea Baumel Mustelier, Brett Donnelly, Marvin Baumel, Blake Lynch, and Derrick Christopher Mustelier.

## DOMA IS DEAD

On Wednesday, June 26th, the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act was struck down! The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that our federal government could no longer deny equal benefits and protections of its laws to legally married same-gender couples. DOMA, the court majority stated, was “unconstitutional as a deprivation of the equal liberty of persons that is protected by the Fifth Amendment.” The ruling allows lesbian and gay couples in thirteen states and the District of Columbia, where same-gender marriage is legal, to receive more than 1,100 federal benefits and protections.

Although Wednesday’s ruling was a momentous legal victory for us, we must remember that we do not have legalized same-gender marriage in all fifty states. In addition, numerous legal complications will now occur for legally married lesbians and gays.

Marriage equality is inconsistent in the United States and the U.S. Supreme Court did not declare same-gender marriage a constitutional right. The ruling defers to each state to decide what constitutes a legal marriage. In states that do not have same-gender marriage, we will begin to see litigation on behalf of lesbian and gay couples who are denied recognition even though they were legally married in another jurisdiction. The Fifth Amendment guarantees every person equal protection of the law. It will be difficult for states to justify marriage laws that deny equal protection.

Most lesbian and gay couples have been focused on marriage equality without considering the possibility of divorce. However, we know that some relationships, no matter who the people are, end. With marriage equality, divorce problems occur for lesbians and gays that heterosexual couples do not experience. Lesbian and gay couples who wed in a state where same-gender marriage is legal, and then move to a state where it is not recognized often find

that they cannot get a divorce. Divorce procedures, unless the couple goes through appeals and higher courts, take place in the state where the couple resides.

Traditionally, the Internal Revenue Service has maintained that state law decides the definition of marriage. Because of the Supreme Court’s ruling that invalidated the federal government’s definition of marriage as between one man and one woman, the IRS has to decide whether or not to recognize the same-gender marriages of lesbian and gay taxpayers whose home states do not consider their marriages to be legal.

Many couples who have been legally married for three years are asking if they can amend their past federal tax returns and receive refunds. The IRS has to establish guidelines for amending prior years’ returns and penalties for under-withholding.

As a result of the Supreme Court’s ruling, lesbian and gay couples, who live in states that recognize same-gender marriage, will be able to apply



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for health benefits as a couple rather than individually. Some, who qualified individually for Medicaid, may discover that they no longer qualify if they file taxes jointly because their combined income exceeds the level of eligibility.

Also, if lesbians and gays change their filing status from “single” to “married filing jointly,” the couples who are at the upper or the lower income levels may have significant increases in payments to the government. The tax code contains marriage penalties for couples who have higher incomes. Lower income persons could lose benefits if they marry and file jointly. Their spouse’s income could disqualify them from receiving various benefits. For example, low-income individuals could lose Medicaid if their spouse’s income raises them above the financial limits.



In a second decision on Wednesday, June 26th, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals did not have legal standing to hear the appeal of Proposition 8, which banned same-gender marriage after the Supreme Court of California endorsed it in 2008. The ruling on Proposition 8 allows same-gender marriage to resume in California.

On Wednesday, June 26th, two significant legal U.S. Supreme Court rulings occurred. Both are the result of and contribute to profound cultural changes in the United States. First, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was overturned. Second, same-gender marriage was restored in California. Government sanctioned discrimination of lesbian and gay citizens was acknowledged. On that day, justice and equality were affirmed. The process for achieving it has begun!

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\*\*\* Editor’s note: On Wednesday, June 26th, I was vacationing in Provincetown, MA. That morning, friends and I went to the Human Rights Center to wait for the results of the U.S. Supreme Court rulings. We waited anxiously and hopefully. Finally the decisions were announced. Needless to say, we cheered, hugged, laughed and cried. Later in the day, a rainbow appeared in the sky.