

THE WORKSHOP SERIES

If we have grown up in the mainstream of American culture, we have learned that homosexuality (as well as bisexuality and transgender issues) should be kept hidden or be condemned and that heterosexuality is the only normal form of sexual expression. We have learned not to talk about homosexuality. We have learned to fear that our children might be influenced to become gay. We have learned to accept destructive stereotypes about gay people.

Each of us responds to this learning in a different way—from feeling discomfort when discussing homosexuality or being with bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people, to violent hatred of such people. Or we may never have thought much about homosexuality at all because we assume that everyone in our lives is heterosexual. All of these responses can be considered examples of homophobia. None of us likes to think of ourselves as homophobic and we often resist identifying our fears about homosexuality. The purpose of the Welcoming Congregation Program is not to blame ourselves for our feelings, but to help us understand how we learned our reactions to homosexuality and how we can replace old attitudes with new ones.

The Welcoming Congregation Workshop Series is an introspective and interactive educational journey into the issues surrounding the lives of bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people. The learning goals are:

- To explore thoughts, feelings, and current knowledge about sexual orientation (homosexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality) and gender identification (transgender).
- To probe the origins of our beliefs about sexual orientation and gender identification.
- To test attitudes toward sexual orientation and gender identification in Unitarian Universalist congregations and society, and their connections to current social issues such as AIDS, racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and so on.

- To understand the experiences of bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people.
- To see the effects of heterosexism and homophobia on people of all sexual orientations in Unitarian Universalist congregations.
- To uncover the biblical roots of common religious perspectives on homosexuality.
- To devise individual and institutional strategies for Unitarian Universalist congregations to become more welcoming to bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people and their families.

Structure

This manual contains plans for 14 two-hour workshops, sequenced to promote consciousness-raising and critical thinking about attitudes toward bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people. Its design assumes that a group of people from the participating congregation will commit to be involved in the entire workshop series, rather than dropping in occasionally.

The workshops require at least one leader, and preferably two. Weekly meetings work best, but bi-weekly meetings are a possibility. Longer gaps between workshops tend to dilute the developmental sequence, though a once per month series is not unworkable. Weekend retreats are also possible.

This manual provides suggested readings and lists other resources. Each workshop contains activities that address the learning goals, detailed directions for conducting the activities, suggested time allotted to each reading assignment, and helpful hints for the workshop leaders. Leaders should read the entire handbook before beginning the workshops, and practice doing the activities before each meeting.

Shortening the Program

Although the Welcoming Congregation Program is flexible, the sequence of workshops is important. Ideally, to accomplish the most thorough introspection, groups should participate in all 14 workshops. If you must reduce the number of workshops, the following priorities should guide your selections.

- **Workshops 1, 2, and 14** cannot be sacrificed because they provide basic information and closure. They should be conducted first, second, and last, respectively.
- **Workshops 3, 4, and 9** make up the “heart” of the program. If you can do only four or five workshops, choose your fourth and fifth from this category. We strongly recommend that you conduct at least six workshops to maintain the integrity of the program and your congregation’s commitment. Schedule them in numerical sequence, because they build on one another.
- **Workshops 8, 10, and 13** focus on specific areas of interest. If you can only do seven or eight workshops, select your seventh and eighth from this category.

If you wish to conduct your program as a weekend event, set up the workshops in blocks with breaks for meals, exercise, or free time in between. Ideally, no more than three workshops should run on each day, since the material is intense and participants need time to integrate emotional and cognitive growth. This format allows for six workshops in two days, and the ideal situation would include a follow-up of several more sessions at a later time. You may have to make adjustments based on people’s schedules.

No matter what form your series takes, schedule at least two hours for each workshop to allow ample discussion time.

Recommendations

Length of Program	Recommended Workshops
6 Sessions	1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 14
7 Sessions	1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 13, 14
8 Sessions	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 13, 14
9 Sessions	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 11/12,* 13, 14
10 Sessions	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11/12,* 13, 14
12 Sessions	All but 6 and 7
14 Sessions	All

* Combine materials from the two sessions.

Weekend Retreat Format

1. Kick-off weekend with follow-ups: six-session format—one session Friday night, two sessions Saturday morning, one session Saturday afternoon, Saturday evening, and Sunday morning.
2. All in one weekend: eight-session format—two sessions Friday night, four to five sessions Saturday, one to two sessions Sunday.

Enhancing the Workshops

We recommend that the workshop series be led by two people. The ideal team consist of one bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender leader working with a heterosexual leader. This mixed approach will provide participants with different perspectives and model the belief that addressing homophobia and heterosexism is everyone’s responsibility, regardless of sexual orientation. Working with a partner also gives leaders someone with whom to discuss and plan workshop activities, as well as someone with whom to share the leadership responsibilities during each workshop.

Leaders are encouraged to make the workshop series their own by using beginning and ending rituals that participants may be familiar and comfortable with, and by supplementing the materials. Often, participants feel more at ease if they have time to socialize, and food or beverages could be a regular part of the program. The workshops require about two hours each, so scheduling two and a half hours, with time before or after the workshop for conversation and refreshment, will add to the enjoyment.

Some of the workshops call for the use of a film, and several suggest inviting panels of speakers, so planning ahead is very important. The films should be reserved at least one month in advance, and most speakers need more than a month’s lead time as well. Leaders should handle all the logistical planning at the beginning of the workshop series to ensure a successful program.

The Process

Becoming a Welcoming Congregation involves many phases of information gathering, congregational self-exploration, and personal consciousness raising. It will include intellectual discussions, the sharing of deeply held values and

beliefs, and the expression of strong feelings. By starting this process, your congregation will embark on an arduous but rewarding journey. This manual offers concrete suggestions for a sequence of steps to assist you along this courageous path.

These suggestions originate in research from the fields of psychology, education, and consciousness raising and share several principles that underlie all of the activities in this manual. These principles include:

- The views, experience, and knowledge of every participant must be explicitly solicited and considered in the process.
- The process must provide structures for critically analyzing the content.
- The process must promote psychological development by helping people to expand the boundaries of how they see the world and to increase their options for how to act on their expanded view.

This process needs to be an active dialogue between Unitarian Universalists and their environment—their congregation, their church, their community, and the contemporary culture. Growth and clarity come not just from personal unfolding, or from just learning accurate information about the environment, but rather from interaction among all the parts mentioned above.

This kind of dialogue requires support, a high level of trust, some communication guidelines, and no surprises. People exploring strongly felt values need to feel as safe as possible in order to participate fully in the process. The activities contained in this manual are arranged to create a sequence of learning conditions that will allow participants to move toward greater awareness and feel safe enough to take risks.

These conditions are presented by Robert Kegan in *The Evolving Self* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), Gerald Weinstein and Lee Bell in an unpublished manuscript (1983), and Roberta Harro in her doctoral dissertation (1986). If created in the learning environment, these conditions are likely to promote growth, learning, and the clarification of participants' thoughts and values. The conditions are *confirmation*, *contradiction*, and *continuity*.

Confirmation. A feeling of acceptance and safety draws out and affirms what participants currently know and think about a topic. Every person should feel included and affirmed as s/he is now—with

absolutely no judgments made about what they say. People who express rigidly held beliefs need to be joined, not judged. The joining and confirmation create a feeling of safety and less need to defend a position. Kegan's research indicates that the safer a person feels, the more likely he or she is to share his or her real thoughts and feelings with others, and to take the risk of considering others' views. Creating an atmosphere of confirmation opens the door to growth.

Contradiction. Kegan's research suggests that growth takes place when a person feels safe enough to acknowledge and grapple with a moderate degree of contradiction between what s/he holds to be true, and new information.

Contradictions may come from other participants ("My cousin is gay, and he wants to have children"), a lecture presented to the group (facts to refute stereotypes), a reading assignment (from a gay teacher's point of view), a video (about AIDS), research (on child sexual abuse), a structured activity (role-playing), a guest panel (lesbian and gay speakers), or personal reflection and analysis (the origins of my beliefs about gay parenting).

Some contradictions are designed into the workshops, while others will arise in discussions. Whatever the source of a contradiction, several things need to happen when it arises:

- It needs to be said out loud to someone in the group.
- It needs to be expanded and explored.
- There needs to be time to reflect, react, respond, draw conclusions (not necessarily resolve them, but "take them apart" for study), and report to the group. This is called "processing" the information and reactions, and the processing of contradictions is the core of consciousness raising.

The workshops should draw out or present as many different perspectives as possible and invite elaboration of all those perspectives in as much detail as possible. It is not a good idea to stop in the middle of a processing discussion without a sense of what will happen next (how the group will take steps toward resolution).

Since most of us are not comfortable grappling with conflict, and growth and change are generally difficult, there is a natural drive in most groups to get resolution quickly. It is important to remember that the richest and most challenging part of this

process is explaining in detail what we mean and believe, and listening to someone else do the same. These discussions are often dynamic, emotional, and hard to handle—which is why it is critical to have established confirmation before introducing contradictions. The goal of this phase of the process is to keep everyone involved, open, searching, and questioning toward resolution, whether that involves change or not. Some form of resolution is needed for a sense of continuity to emerge.

Continuity. This involves identifying new ways to think about bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people and the church, to look at the implications of the decision to become a Welcoming Congregation, to define an ongoing support system for new ways of thinking, and to anticipate problems resulting from the shift and deal with them. These tasks will be shared through workshop activities, and it is important to give them as much validity as the content-focused activities, since they form the basis for the congregation's next step.

Kegan's three conditions may help workshop leaders understand what the learning program is trying to accomplish, and to focus on the aspects of the process that are most important.

Leadership Preparation

Effective leadership is one of the most important ingredients of a successful workshop experience. The activities provide content and process, but the leader must establish a learning climate in which participants can express their thoughts and feelings and ask questions freely. The leader has a powerful influence on how participants deal with issues and integrate new learnings. This doesn't mean that the leader must be an expert on homosexuality or homophobia. The leader needs, however, to identify her or his own struggles to understand issues raised in the workshops, and be willing to openly share this process with the group.

Whether one or two people lead the workshop series, and whether the leaders are bisexual, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, or transgender, there are several questions potential leaders should ask themselves before undertaking this responsibility.

What do I know about bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender oppression? Leaders should take themselves through the workshop activities before attempting to lead others through them. This process serves two purposes: you will have an opportunity

to increase your understanding and knowledge of the topic, and you will be better able to identify with participants' reactions to workshop activities.

If possible, we highly recommend that potential leaders attend a homophobia workshop as participants before attempting to lead this workshop series. In addition, we recommend that you do some preparatory readings beyond those included here. This preparation will increase your ability to guide discussions, answer questions, and provide additional resources to participants.

What are my feelings about bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people? It is important to acknowledge that we all probably feel some degree of discomfort with the topic of homosexuality, regardless of our sexual orientation. We have grown up in a culture that teaches us that homosexuality and bisexuality are deviant and unacceptable. Even those who are striving to unlearn negative images of bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people need to understand how deeply rooted our negative feelings about homosexuality can be.

Leaders need to be willing to acknowledge their own discomfort with discussing homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgender identity, and to serve as a model for participants by sharing their feelings with the group.

The process of exploring feelings and attitudes about bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people can raise intense feelings. You should be far enough along in your own self-exploration so that your feelings are not overwhelming. In addition, you should be comfortable with others who are expressing their feelings.

What are my motivations for wanting to lead? Be clear with yourself about why you want to lead this workshop series and what you expect to get from leading it. If you are a bisexual, gay, or lesbian person who is angry at heterosexuals and sees the workshop as an opportunity to turn the tables, vent your anger, or make others understand your personal pain, you are not ready for this role. If you are a heterosexual person who feels sorry for bisexual, gay, or lesbian people, or guilty about your own homophobia, you are not ready. If leading this workshop series interests you because you think it will be controversial, exciting, or a good way to learn something you don't know much about, please think twice.

If, however, you are a bisexual, gay, heterosexual, or lesbian person who has done some work to increase your own awareness and knowledge about

homophobia and heterosexism, and if you have a sincere interest in helping others do the same and feel comfortable with your own sexual orientation, proceed with enthusiasm. The same applies for transgender people.

Am I willing to do personal sharing? Participants will be asked to talk about their feelings and attitudes toward homosexuality, bisexuality, and gender identification. A leader who is comfortable with this can provide participants with a model for sharing, and encourage a sense of mutual trust and safety.

In particular, you need to consider whether you are willing to make your sexual orientation and/or gender identification known to participants. For heterosexual leaders, this probably is not an issue, but for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or trans-gender leaders, this decision must be addressed before beginning the workshop series. A bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender leader who is afraid to "come out" will experience a great deal of anxiety and might send mixed messages to participants. Heterosexual leaders, on the other hand, might have to contend with the assumption that they are bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender because they are leading the workshop.

Regardless of your sexual orientation and gender identification, you must be clear that the reason for revealing this information is to create an authentic and open environment in which participants can learn. Personal experiences can be a powerful part of this process, but should not distract participants from their own self-examination and learning.

What kind of leadership style am I most comfortable with? This workshop series encourages a high degree of interaction among participants. Although you will, at times, present a short introduction to an activity or provide some information, most activities are designed as small and large group discussions. If you are most comfortable with a lecture format, you will need to adjust your expectations. Rather than you talking and participants listening and occasionally asking questions, you and the participants will be discussing together. The workshop leader's role is that of a guide or facilitator who creates an environment in which participants can explore their own attitudes and learn new information.

Can I establish an open and safe learning environment? Your most important task is to establish and maintain effective communication and safety. It is essential that you discuss the following Participation Guidelines with participants during the first workshop, and review them during each session.

Participation Guidelines

- **Respect anonymity.** Encourage participants to share activities, readings, and discussions with others outside the workshop, but stress the importance of keeping the content of personal sharing by participants anonymous. A participant may request that a comment be kept confidential as well and is meant only for the other class members.
- **Set own boundaries for personal sharing.** Each participant is responsible for setting her or his own boundaries for personal sharing. Invite participants to determine what and how much of their own identities, values, and history they choose to share; whatever boundaries each participant sets are to be respected by the group.
- **Speak from personal experience. Avoid generalizing.** Participants should avoid using generalizations about people or speaking for others. Encourage "I think, feel, believe, experience . . ." statements rather than "Bisexual people, gay men, heterosexual people, lesbians, trans-gender people do, think, feel . . ." statements.
- **Respect differences.** Help participants to hear and understand different experiences and perspectives, rather than try to convince others that they are wrong. Everyone must understand that even though the purpose of the workshop series is to change attitudes and actions, each participant must have control over his own change process.
- **Encourage effective communication skills.** Review the basic principles of good communication: Maintain eye contact, avoid interrupting or giving advice, use "I" statements, share speaking time, ask clarifying questions.

Finally, make it clear at the beginning that no one will be asked to share her or his sexual orientation and/or gender identification during the workshop series. Individual participants may choose to share their sexual orientation and/or gender identification but participants need to control this decision. For many bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people, coming out is a profoundly frightening experience. Because of prejudice against bisexual, gay, and lesbian people, revealing one's orientation is not always safe. The same is true for people who understand their gender in a different way than man or woman. On the

other hand, coming out can be an empowering and affirming experience.

If individual participants come out during the series, or if outside speakers do so, it can provide powerful learning experiences for all participants, but you need to be aware of two considerations. First, avoid letting participants focus their attention on those who come out or treat them as "resident experts," "specimens," or "spokespersons" for the bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender community. Each bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender person can speak only from hir own experience and should not be expected to share more than do other participants. Each participant should be focusing on hir own feelings and beliefs, not on those of other participants.

Second, bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people may suffer from the same lack of knowledge and awareness that heterosexuals do. In a culture that discourages anyone from discussing homosexuality and bisexuality, homosexual and bisexual people are often as confused as heterosexuals. Bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people have just as hard a time learning about themselves, and may have internalized many of the same myths and stereotypes about bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people that heterosexuals have.

Communicating with the Congregation

It is important to try to reach members of the congregation who don't participate in the program. Here are some suggestions for sharing your work with them.

Bulletin Board. Place a Welcoming Congregation bulletin board in an accessible location of your building. You might post readings from the workshops, or current events pieces from the newspaper. You might, if participants are willing, post some of the newsprint material from the workshop series to give people a feel for the workshops. Again, if you do this, get express permission from every participant to do so. You might create an interactive piece where people write responses to questions. An example might be, "When did you first learn there were gay men in the world? How? Did this make you feel good, bad, or indifferent?" You might list people to contact with concerns or questions. Make the bulletin board appealing and attractive. This simple act will send a powerful message to the congregation.

Newsletter. Use the congregational newsletter to convey information to the congregation. This might include announcements, testimonials from participants, basic tidbits of information, or thought-provoking questions. Examples of the latter two are:

- There are over 1,000 legal benefits to couples who can get legally married.
- How many congregations in our Association are officially recognized as Welcoming Congregations?
- When did the Unitarian Universalist Association pass its first resolution in support of bisexual, gay, and lesbian people?
- The word for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people in the West African Dagara culture is "gatekeepers." They believe that they "vibrate differently."

You can create your own questions and facts or contact the Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns at the Unitarian Universalist Association for more.

Email. Create a distribution discussion list where people can get information and interact with others about issues raised in the Welcoming Congregation Program. You might use "Twenty Questions About Homosexuality" by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (see p. 44), and ask list members to respond to the questions.

Sunday Service. Use the bulletin board to make announcements. Work with the minister and/or worship committee to allow for brief testimonials of what individuals have learned as they've gone through the process.

Congregational Leadership. You might wish to ask for a series of 15-30 minute sessions with your congregation's governing board or program council and, instead of reporting progress, present an exercise from the curriculum. Examples might be "Fears and Gains" from Workshop 1, a shortened version of "Word Brain Association" from Workshop 2, or one of the religion questions from Workshop 8. This will create a different kind of dialogue than will mere reporting.

Openings and Closings At-a-Glance

All readings and hymns come from *Singing the Living Tradition* (Boston: The Unitarian Universalist Association/Beacon Press, 1993).

Workshop 1: Introductions and Expectations

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #443 "We Arrive Out of Many Singular Rooms"

Hymn: #396 "I Know This Rose Will Open"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson
Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"

Workshop 2: What We Know and How We Learned It

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #502 by W. E. B. DuBois

Hymn: #127 "Can I See Another's Woe?"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson
Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"

Workshop 3: The Common Elements of Oppression

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #584 "A Network of Mutuality"

Hymn: #170 "Singing For Our Lives"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson
Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"

Workshop 4: Gender Socialization and Homophobia

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #569 "Stand By This Faith"

Hymn: #121 "We'll Build a Land"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson
Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"

Workshop 5: Racism and Homophobia

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #550 "We Belong to the Earth"

Hymn: #305 "De Colores"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson
Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"

Workshop 6: HIV/AIDS

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #463 by Adrienne Rich

Hymn: #295 "Sing Out Praises for the Journey"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson
Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"

Workshop 7: The Radical Right

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #632 "Passover Remembered"

Hymn: #162 "Gonna Lay Down My Sword and Shield"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson
Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"

Workshop 8: Religion and Homosexuality

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #598 "Without Hate" or
#638 "Love"

Hymn: #392 "Hineh Mah Tov"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson
Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"

Workshop 9: Experiences of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and/or Transgender People

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #576 "A Litany of Restoration"

Hymn: #128 "For All That Is Our Life"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson
Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"

Workshop 10: History

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #447 by Albert Schweitzer

Hymn: #348 "Guide My Feet"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson
Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"

Workshop 11: Bisexuality and Biphobia

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #420 by Annie Dillard

Hymn: #298 "Wake Now My Senses"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson
Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"

Workshop 12: Transgender Identity:

What It Means

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #595 "Free From Suffering"

Hymn: #407 "We're Gonna Sit at the
Welcome Table"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson

Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"

Workshop 13: How Homophobia Hurts Us All

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #561 by Margaret Mead

Hymn: #51 "Lady of the Seasons' Laughter"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson

Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"

Workshop 14: What Now?

Opening/Chalice Lighting

Reading: #443 "We Arrive Out of Many
Singular Rooms"

Hymn: #396 "I Know This Rose Will Open"

Closing/Check Out

Unison Reading: #689 by Paul Robeson

Hymn: #402 "From You I Receive"