

## ***Just Love***

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Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Kamloops

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### Pride & Sharing Our Faith Sunday

200 years ago as the idea of democracy was hatched, people gained having a voice and choice in their lives. With new inventions like the telephone and the automobile, people suddenly had ways to get around, to meet and connect...including gays and lesbians. The closet door was about to push open.

The institution of marriage, in North America changed in parallel to the women's civil rights movement.

Increasingly, marriage became about love, commitment, caring, and supporting each other as equals and partners. As marriage became about love, it also became more exclusive and heterosexual in appearance.

Gays and lesbians now found themselves being taught that marriage wasn't only about economics and procreation, but about love. Our society places increasingly high value on falling in love. Through this shift in values, gays and lesbians who fell in love slowly began to organize.

But to legitimize same sex unions by granting equal marriage rights to gays and lesbians, was really only one part of a larger vision.

Breaking the heteronormative stake to the institution of marriage meant that a culture shift would inevitably have to follow, and deliver all the associated benefits to same-sex couples that had been reserved for traditional male female couples.

And there are benefits. Pension transferability, spousal health and life insurance benefits, co-owning and bequeathing property... income tax exemptions...child adoption, divorce rights... legal decision making powers around one's spouse's' medical care, institutionalization, even making funeral arrangements...

What about Pride?

The acronym representing sexual orientations other than heterosexual in the 1970s was LGB, that is lesbian, gay, bisexual... over the years it grew to include other letters representing new identities who wanted a voice... LGBT, then LGBTQ and so on. One version used by a Nova Scotia college queer collective is certainly the longest, yet interestingly pronounceable version, QUILTBAG (queer, questioning, undecided, intersex, lesbian, Trans, two spirit, bisexual, asexual, and gay).

The list can never be exhaustive, and perhaps only serves to demonstrate who has been left off. So, in the spirit of inclusion, today I'm going to mostly use the umbrella terms "rainbow" and "queer".

I have declared today Pride Sunday at UUFK...why not? Most UU churches celebrate pride in summertime in tandem with civic Pride events taking place around the country. We are on hiatus in summer.

I think it is important to talk about Pride, and Love and Justice, and how Unitarian Universalists and this Fellowship fit in this movement.

I love that pride affirms queer people and our dignity, that it celebrates victories for Justice and rights, and reminds us of battles yet to be fought and won...

I love that pride inspires vulnerable people to stop hiding their true selves, to live with brave integrity, and empower them to risk rejection of family, peers, and community,

I love that Pride helps individuals shed negative emotions of shame about who they are and who they love...

I love that Rainbow allies, friends, neighbours, and the larger community participate in pride events, showing solidarity, compassion, and love, sometimes even reconciling old prejudices, and changing hurtful ways.

But I have some ambivalent feelings about Pride. Given that Canada has had marriage equality for a dozen years, and that other laws now protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation and increasingly gender identity....is celebrating Pride really still necessary?

Honestly? I'm a little resistant of being swept up in the sea of rainbow identities and issues, to which I feel only distantly related by virtue of my own ambiguous identity as a Two spirit queer lesbian. I am nowhere close to understanding some of my cousins in the Rainbow family.

I am very lucky old lesbian...as I teenager, even in the 1960's and 70's the fact of my sexual orientation never changed my relationships with family and friends one iota. Not every person has that ease in being out or coming out.

I don't consider myself a prude either; Pride Parades and the wearing of provocative sexualized costumes, and raw public expressions of sexuality that are legend at pride parades ...these still embarrass me a bit, and certainly make me feel old.

Maybe the challenge lies in the fact that the Rainbow umbrella has grown so large, with many varied people who have competing issues and goals.

I began celebrating Pride and going to Pride parades at the age of fifty something when I became a Unitarian Universalist. Suddenly, the right to Love became a justice issue grounded in religious principles...and that I cannot duck. Despite progressive laws and a society which is evolving to accept and is becoming normalized around the spectra of sexual identities and expression of sexuality....there is still much to do for Love to be Just in our town, this country, and the world.

When I moved here to Kamloops, I was shocked to learn there is no Pride parade held on downtown streets here, that in fact, former city counselors rejected the idea because of their discriminatory perspectives.

Let's look back a little to see how Pride evolved;

The modern gay liberation movement in North America began the summer of 1969 with New York City's unprecedented Stonewall Riots, occurring in the early morning hours of June 28<sup>th</sup>.

The police were attempting yet another raid on a popular gay bar in the heart of Greenwich Village that night, a common practice, but the bar's patrons fought back forcefully this time, resulting in a humiliating defeat for the police and garnering nation-wide media attention.

On the first anniversary of the riots, marches took place in New York, Boston, Minneapolis, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The movement simultaneously gained momentum in Canada. In August 1971, the first protests for gay rights took place with small demonstrations in Ottawa and Vancouver demanding an end to all forms of state discrimination against gays and lesbians.

Discrimination took very blatant forms in those years: in employment, housing, education, religious institutions, business, the hospitality industry, health care... people rejected and targeted for simply being with the person they choose to love, and daring to tell others whom they love.

The road to Canada's Rainbow liberation had several milestones.

In 1965, Everett Klippert, a Northwest Territories mechanic, acknowledged to police that he is gay, and he'd had sex with men for 24 years, and was unlikely to change. Klippert was arrested and sent to prison indefinitely, branded a "dangerous sex offender,"

You remember the line, *"there's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation."*?

In 1967 Justice Minister Pierre Trudeau proposed amendments to the Criminal Code among which, changes that would relax the laws against homosexuality—Trudeau's iconic phrase came out of his comments on homosexuality.

By 1969 the criminal code was amended and decriminalized homosexuality in Canada. Two years later, Everett Klippert was released from prison.

In 1978 Canada's new Immigration Act removed "homosexuals" from the list of inadmissible classes.

In 1979 The Canadian Human Rights Commission recommended that "sexual orientation" be added to the Canadian Human Rights Act and every province was required to include sexual orientation in its human rights legislation.

36 years ago today in 1981: more than 300 men were arrested following police raids at four gay bath houses in Toronto. The following night, 3,000 people march in downtown Toronto to protest the arrests. This was considered Canada's 'Stonewall.'

With sexual orientation added as a protected class to the Charter of Rights and Freedom, politicians and activists had a strong framework from which to secure the same social and tax benefits for same-sex couples as those received by people in straight, and common-law relationships.

Canada legalized same sex marriage in 2005. BC in 2003.

The first same-sex marriage performed by any church in Canada was a couple who are married by the first Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg in 1974, officiated by Rev. Norm Naylor. Wasn't legally recognized, of course.

Unitarian Universalist churches were responsible for the first same-sex marriages in six provinces, mostly in the 1970s, although the provincial governments often refused to recognize these marriages.

Unitarian Universalism has long been at the forefront of activism for civil rights for queer people. There too it's been a bumpy road.

At present there are hundreds of ordained Unitarian Universalist ministers who openly identify as queer, including a few who are transgendered.

However, despite claims of openness in our congregations, in the 1970s, when Rev. Richard Nash and Rev. James stole came out in the late 60s and early 70s respectively they never found other settles ministries.

Openly gay and lesbian ministers searching for settlements were routinely turned down at this time based on that issue alone. The 1970 UUA General Assembly passed a general resolution to end discrimination against bisexuals and homosexuals, and called upon congregations to develop sex education programs to promote healthy attitudes toward all forms of sexuality.

Over the years, other resources and curricula emerged as the acceptance and embrace of LGB people grew.

Our showpiece is the Our Whole Lives lifespan sexuality education program with curricula ranging from kindergarten to elder years.

There is risk in living an active, liberal faith such as ours. In 2008 a man entered the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church in Knoxville, and shot and killed two church members and injured others....this attack was targeted by an individual who opposed that the Unitarian Church was welcoming to LGBT people and has a liberal stance on many issues.

In the aftermath of that shooting incident, the Standing on the Side of Love campaign emerged.

This ongoing campaign's goal is to harness love's power to challenge exclusion, oppression, and violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, race, religion, or any other identity.

These canary yellow T-shirts have become iconic uniforms for Unitarian Universalists and allies, worn publicly while engaging in acts of social witness and protest.

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Who here took part in the welcoming congregation certification process that this fellowship undertook in the year --?

The Unitarian Universalist Association launched a welcoming congregation program to help congregations learn how to undo homophobia – and later, trans phobia (prejudice against transgender people) – in our hearts and minds, our congregations, and our communities.

A welcoming congregation agrees to make commitments. Examples of these include:

1. Being inclusive and expressive of the concerns of people who are LGBTQ + at every level of congregational life – in worship, and programs, and in social locations.

2. A WC does not assume any one's affectional/sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Vocabulary of worship reflects this perception; worship celebrates diversity by inclusivity of language and content.
3. The bylaws and other official documents of the welcoming congregation include an affirmation and non-discrimination clause affecting all dimensions of congregational life, including membership, hiring practices, and the calling of religious professionals.
4. A welcoming congregation engages in outreach into lesbian, Gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities, both through its advertising and by actively supporting other LGBTQ affirmative groups.
5. A welcoming congregation, as an advocate for LGBT to people, attends to legislative developments and works to promote justice, freedom, and equality in the larger society. It speaks that when the rights and dignity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people are at stake.

That gives you a sense of what it means to be a Welcoming Congregation.

99% of Canadian congregations have now completed the welcoming congregation certification program and voted their agreement.

When first available in 1988 the WCP did not address anything relating to transgender issues. New resources and trans workshops have since been added. Canadian congregations have been encouraged to use materials and resources that work for them. The program continues to evolve in response to the emerging issues of a rapidly changing Rainbow world.

Only two Congregations in Canada have *recertified* – Ottawa and Toronto – it is recommended that congregations recertify every five years.

Some might say, that the first principle covers us... if we say we affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every being, we're good enough.

This kind of confidence creates a barrier to any real learning or change of attitudes. Silence is the greatest challenge of all. Achieving meaning full equality for LGBT to Canadians goes well beyond same-sex marriage rights to current emerging issues, like blood and organ donation, assisted reproduction, adoption and immigration issues just to name a few.

So what can this Fellowship do to keep our Welcoming status alive and thriving?

Last fall, Journalist Angela Klassen wrote about Pride in Kamloops This Week:

*For a local example of anti-LGBT sentiment, I invite you to go online and read through some of the comments posted when the city opened a gender-neutral washroom in Riverside Park this past summer.*

*If equating a trans person who would like to use a single-occupancy restroom with a pedophile strikes you as accepting, we may be using different metrics.*

*Here's another: In 2011, a national survey of high school students from the University of Winnipeg found one in five LGBTQ students has been physically harassed or assaulted because of their sexual orientation.*

*Nearly two-thirds of the teens surveyed felt unsafe at school.*

*Leaving Canada aside a moment — because thanks to the internet, immigration and common compassion, community doesn't stop at international borders — researchers with the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association noted earlier this year that being gay is still illegal in 74 countries.*

*In 13 of those, it is punishable by death.*

*Last year, a man entered a gay night club in Orlando, Fla., and killed 49 people, wounding 53 more.*

*Pride is about a fight for acceptance — and it's worth noting being accepted is different than being tolerated.*

*But it's also about having a space where, hopefully, ideally, for a few hours at least, you know you don't have to fight. Where you are among friends and supporters. Where you are safe.*

Unitarian Universalists are by nature and inquiring people, open to learning, willing to transform old ideas and find better ways of building beloved community together.

Queer theologian, Carter Heyward said this: *“love is active, effective, and creates righteousness — justice here on earth. Love is not a choice; for humans, it means being willing to participate with others in healing the world and building beloved community.”*

Let us take from life it's coals, not its ashes.

Fan the flames of love and justice;

join hands and hearts in common endeavour;

and there will be no limit to what we can achieve together.

May it be so, Amen.