

Describing A Welcoming Congregation

by Rabbi D'vorah L. Rose, MA, RN

1.) Community uses “beloved community” or something similar.

This refers to a fully integrated community rather than an “us” and “them” in which “them” needs to be integrated into “us.”

2.) There are established and integrated opportunities in community life for various members and newcomers to share their personal stories without being judged. As desired by the teller, these stories are shared with the entire community.

3.) Leadership is female or out self-identified queer male, intersex, bisexual, transgender, transitioned. This includes clergy, board members, and/or recognized lay leaders. Statistically, congregations with leadership in one or more of these categories is much more welcoming/inclusive/integrated and supportive of sharing personal stories and generally more involved in social action.

4.) A statement about being an inclusive/beloved/welcoming congregation is included in all publicity material; is clearly posted at congregational sites and events; and in newsletters.

5.) Restrooms are clearly marked as non-gendered. And rather than using images which still tend to be gendered, use of words such as “unisex,” “for all genders,” etc.

6.) Language used in liturgy, publicity materials, educational materials, etc. recognizes that sexual orientation and identity can be fluid and non-binary.

7.) The congregation represents the wide diversity of family life, including not only LGBTQI but also interfaith, intercultural, interracial, etc. as this is very much part of the LGBTQI world. This is established in children’s and adult educational programming and materials; in lifecycle events; in ritual life; in liturgy and sermons; in holiday celebrations/observances; and on paperwork for religious schools, membership forms, etc. Forms have “parent A” and “parent B” or “guardian A” and “guardian B,” etc. LGBTQI families receive family prices, are addressed and listed publicly as families, etc.

8.) Fees for membership and related services reflect the financial realities of LGBTQI families and individuals.

9.) LGBTQI resources are visible on-site, including at least one designated staff and/or clergy person who is particularly trained and knowledgeable.

These resources would include, but are not limited to: Printed materials, variety of visual media, discussion groups, classes, crisis information, etc.

10.) The congregation has committed to their religious/faith community's formally-recognized Welcoming process. These include such organizations as "Lutherans Concerned/North America," "More Light Presbyterians," and the United Church of Christ's "Open and Affirming Programs."

11.) The congregation is involved with social justice activity, including LGBTQI civil rights.

12.) There is a regularly scheduled internal review process for the congregation's leadership and for the community. The review asks: Are these checklist items still being accomplished? If not, what needs to happen to return to this status? If they have been attained and are currently active, what further steps to cultivate inclusiveness does the community want to take, and how will this be accomplished?

NOTE: In some congregations, lack of LGBTQI inclusivity is based upon religious views and interpretations of sacred texts. In other communities, these issues are primarily culturally-based. This is a longer conversation; but regardless of why these barriers exist, this checklist helps identify well the external markers of an integrated, inclusive community.

Resources Reviewed in The Development of This Congregational Tool

Address, Rabbi Richard; Kushner, Joel; Mitelman, Geoffrey. Kulanu: All of Us: A Program & Resource Guide for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Inclusion. URJ Press. NY, NY. 2007.

Bay Area Jewish Healing Center <http://www.jewishhealingcenter.org/bajhc-about-2004.htm>

Bisexual Resource Center <http://www.biresource.net/>

Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation, Hebrew Union College - Los Angeles. <http://www.huc.edu/ijsol/>

Institute for Welcoming Resources <http://www.welcomingresources.org/>

Interweave Continental
http://interweaveuu.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=97&Itemid=158

Jewish Mosaic <http://www.jewishmosaic.org/>

Keshet <http://www.keshetonline.org/>

Kleinbaum, Rabbi Sharon and Weissman, Alex. Transforming Your House: A Guide to Creating LGBTQ Ritual, Spiritual, and Pastoral Homes. Congregation Beit Simchat Torah. NY, NY. <http://www.cbst.org/>

More Light Presbyterians <http://www.mlp.org/>

Personal communication with LGBTQI pastoral care providers, progressive and traditional clergy, and religious community members, including the Mormon, Hindu, and Buddhist communities.

Reconciling Ministries Network <http://www.rmnetwork.org/>

Schlager, Bernard. With Open Arms: Gay Affirming Ministries in Bay Area Faith Communities. Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, Pacific School of Religion. Berkeley, CA. 2004.

The Religious Institute: Faithful Voices on Sexuality and Religion
<http://www.religioustheology.org/>

The United Church of Christ Coalition for LGBT Concerns
<http://www.ucccoalition.org/>

TransTorah <http://transtorah.org/>

Union of Reform Judaism (URJ)

<http://www.urjbooksandmusic.com/product.php?productid=971>

<http://urj.org/life/community/glbtc/>

Unitarian Universalists Association: Welcoming Congregations Program

<http://www.uua.org/lgbt/welcoming/program/index.shtml>