

be a very unwelcoming place. We need to offer radical acceptance, because neither family nor society can always be counted on to be accepting. We need to offer unconditional love because Love is at the heart of religious community.”

### AREN'T WE ALREADY WELCOMING?

While a congregation may consider itself welcoming, and may even have openly gay or lesbian members, certification provides a simple and credible tool to enable the congregation to declare itself to the community as a safe space for BGLT persons.

### DON'T WE WELCOME EVERYONE?

We most certainly want to, but we live in communities, and are part of a culture, in which prejudice still exists. As Unitarians and Universalists we fervently believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, but we also acknowledge our own susceptibility to bias. Discovering and confronting these (sometimes unrecognized) prejudices in a non-judgmental, non-threatening group allows us to explore their origins and offers an opportunity to replace prejudice with knowledge. This in turn leads to individual spiritual growth and a congregation which does indeed welcome everyone.

### SOME HISTORY

Canadian Unitarians and Universalists have long supported the right of BGLT persons to equal treatment in their congregations, in society, and before the law.

- In 1974 The Rev. Norm Naylor, UU minister in Winnipeg, officiated at the first same-sex marriage performed in Canada.
- In 1978 the Annual Meeting of the CUC encouraged “all societies and individual members to support all efforts to modify federal and



provincial codes of human rights to bar discrimination based on sexual orientation.”

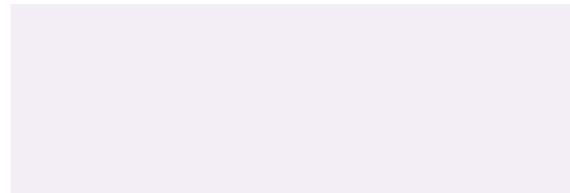
- In 1984 the Annual Meeting adopted a resolution directed at the CUC and its member congregations. It urged member societies to: establish guidelines for the effective inclusion and support of and programming for lesbian and gay people, consider actively the candidacy of qualified religious leaders regardless of sexual orientation, and support religious leaders in the performance of lesbian and gay partnership services.
- In 2004 the CUC appeared before the Supreme Court of Canada in support of equal marriage rights for same-sex couples.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

- Find out more about the CUC Gender and Sexual Diversity Monitoring Group at: [www.cuc.ca/queer](http://www.cuc.ca/queer).
- For more about the CUC Welcoming Congregation program, go to: [www.cuc.ca/programs/welcoming\\_congregations.htm](http://www.cuc.ca/programs/welcoming_congregations.htm).

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Art Brewer is on the CUC's Gender and Sexual Diversity and Monitoring Group and has been a driving force in helping establish the Welcoming Congregation Program in Canada. He gives thanks to the UUA for some of the material used in this brochure.



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# WELCOMING CONGREGATION PROGRAM

by Art Brewer

[WWW.CUC.CA](http://WWW.CUC.CA)

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DU CANADA



# The Welcoming Congregation program was developed for Unitarian Universalist congregations wanting to become more inclusive towards Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transgender (BGLT) people.

By 2004, more than four out of five Unitarians and Universalists in Canada were members of congregations certified as “Welcoming Congregations.”

The program consists of a series of workshops developed by the Office of BGLT Concerns of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA).

Among the workshop titles:

- how homophobia hurts heterosexuals
- connections to other forms of oppression
- gender socialization and homophobia

Many congregations supplement the workshops with activities and events (e.g., films, theatre, guest speakers) that suit their own unique needs and character.

Upon completion of the program, a congregational vote is held to affirm that the congregation welcomes and celebrates the presence and participation of BGLT persons. Certification of the congregation is then issued by the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC).

*As UUs, we fervently believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, but we also acknowledge our own susceptibility to bias.*

## WHAT CHARACTERIZES A WELCOMING CONGREGATION?

A congregation that publicly and successfully welcomes BGLT people has the following qualities:

- Includes and addresses the needs of BGLT persons at every level of congregational life – in worship, in programs, in social occasions and in rites of passage – welcoming not only their presence, but the gifts and particularities of their lives as well.
- Assumes the presence of BGLT people and celebrates this diversity by having inclusive language and content in their worship.
- Fully incorporates the experiences of BGLT persons throughout all programs, including religious education.
- Includes an affirmation and nondiscrimination clause in its by-laws and other official documents affecting all dimensions of congregational life, including membership, hiring practices, and the calling of religious professionals.
- Engages in outreach to the BGLT community in its advertising and by actively supporting BGLT affirmative groups.
- Celebrates the lives of all people and welcomes same-sex couples, recognizing their committed



**BGLT**  
It's not a sandwich!  
BGLT stands for Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transgender.



Neal denHollander receives South Peel's Welcoming Congregation certificate from Art Brewer at the CUC's 2005 Annual Meeting.

relationships, and equally affirms displays of caring and affection without regard to sexual orientation.

- Seeks to nurture ongoing dialogue between BGLT and heterosexual persons and to create deeper trust and sharing.
- Affirms and celebrates BGLT issues and history.
- Attends to legislative developments and works to promote justice and equality in the larger society.
- Speaks out when the rights of BGLT people are at stake.

## WHY SINGLE OUT BGLT PEOPLE?

Unitarian Universalist minister Allison Barrett says: “Because of the role that religion has historically played in denying gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people their full humanity, I believe that we now have a special calling to reach out to our BGLT sisters and brothers. We need to offer an explicit welcome, because the world can still

CONTINUED ON REVERSE ►