



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

"Our History of Welcome"

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"There is nothing in this heart of yours that ever needs to be healed."

My beautiful child.

The magic of [poetry](#) is that even these hypothetical words put in the mouth of Jesus can bring a tear to the eye.

That tear comes in part because we know deep within ourselves how often the language of faith has been used to harm our beloved LGBTQIA+ siblings. And while it's easy to point fingers and say we know where that harm lies - the difficult truth is that harm has been done in Unitarian Universalist congregations as well.

One of the most beautiful things about this faith tradition to me is our willingness to admit when we have done wrong and to commit to change and repair. Not that this process is always straightforward - or ever easy. But we are willing to begin again in love.

I'm going to read a little summary from the UUA's website on the [history](#) of the Welcoming Congregation program, which we're giving special attention to today.

"In 1987 the Unitarian Universalist Association established the Common Vision Planning Committee, a diverse group of clergy and laity from around the North American continent that was tasked with collecting information

about how welcomed and accepted gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons felt in their Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregations.

“Although the Unitarian Universalist Association had been on record since 1970 as supporting the rights and worth of lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons, the lived experience of these people in UU congregations spoke a different, painful truth. The committee published a report that exposed many negative attitudes, deep prejudices, and profound ignorance about bisexual, gay, and lesbian people, which resulted in the exclusion of bisexual, gay, and lesbian people from UU congregations.

“This reality troubled many people who were committed to making UU congregations welcoming and inclusive places for all people, especially minority groups who have traditionally experienced exclusion, discrimination, and misrepresentation within our society. Citing the principles of our UU faith—especially the one that affirms the inherent worth and dignity of every person—the 1989 General Assembly voted to initiate the Welcoming Congregation Program recommended by the Common Vision Planning Committee.”

That resolution passed at General Assembly in 1970 was historic. It’s a proud moment in our history that we took this stance over 50 years ago, and then when we were challenged by the lived experiences of members of the LGBTQIA+ community in our congregations, we looked at what we had already done and said and found it lacking.

The Welcoming Congregation Program that started in 1989 has been a model of inclusivity in faith spaces. UUCYork was certified as a Welcoming Congregation in 1997 thanks to the hard work and loving dedication of many congregants (including Charles and Judy Morreels and Don and Pat Brandl). We know that this certification has made us an open and welcoming space here in York and in the larger community, and we are so grateful to all those whose loving work led to our certification.

However, again - we learn and we grow. The UUA unveiled the Welcoming Congregations renewal program in 2015. There is no expiration for existing certifications, but rather congregations are invited to take on the work of renewal out of their continuing dedication to make our shared spaces fully welcoming, inclusive, and affirming here in the 21st century.

We have witnessed the massive shifts that our country and culture have undergone in the 26 years since UUCYork was certified as a welcoming congregation. We have seen the changes to discrimination law, we have seen the law of the land undergo sweeping changes, we have celebrated at the legalization of same sex marriage. We have learned new language, and we are listening to more stories about people's lived experience of sex, sexuality, gender, and gender expression than ever before. Perhaps most importantly, in the face of sweeping change, we are learning how much we do not know, we are learning about the need to listen to those most impacted by discrimination about their experiences.

And the sad and ugly truth is we have also seen more frightening changes that challenge our shared values. We have seen anti-trans legislation passed in state after state, we have heard about and witnessed the struggles with banning books in libraries and in public schools, we have spoken up in the debates in our families and our schools and our communities about the need for real honest communication and education about human sexuality even when it is being shut down again and again.

It's important that our faith tradition took a public stance in 1970. It's important that we codified the idea of welcome in 1989. It's important that this congregation certified as Welcoming in 1997. And it is clearer every day that this work is not done, and we must be deliberate and purposeful in rededicating ourselves to it again and again. Our faith calls us to this work.

I'm so glad and grateful that Kathy Helms, as the LBGTQIA+ representative to our social justice committee, has agreed to work with me to ensure that UUCYork meets all the criteria for renewing its Welcoming Congregation

status in the 2023-2024 congregational year. It's my hope that you will eagerly support and engage with us as our community rededicates ourselves again to the deeply rooted work of Love, the core of all our shared values.

May each heart who finds their way here find loving welcome. May we prepare our hearts to learn, to grow, and to embody that sense of welcome.

May it be so.