

*This is a presentation made to the CLF Board of Directors on March 27, 2008 that resulted in a unanimous vote of the Board that CLF become an official Welcoming Congregation.*

***Woven Into the Fabric***  
**A Presentation to the CLF Board in Support**  
**Of Its Vote to Become a Welcoming Congregation**  
**March 27, 2008**

This story appeared in the June 2004 issue of *Quest* <http://clfu.org/quest/2004-06.html>.

**The Princess and...**

(by Tracy Duncan, director of religious education, First Parish of Sudbury, Massachusetts.)

*Once upon a time there lived a princess named Amalia. She was loving and caring and tried very hard not to ever hurt any living thing. One day a messenger came to the palace where she lived, telling the court about a young prince whom an evil sorcerer held captive in a faraway fortress. He had a spell on him, and only someone who had never deliberately killed anything could rescue him. The sorcerer thought there would never be anyone like that, because almost everybody kills things that annoy them, like mosquitoes, or things they fear, like spiders or even wolves. But the princess knew she had never killed anything. She wore long sleeves in summer to keep off the mosquitoes, and if she was afraid of anything she told herself it was her problem and not the creature's, and she either walked away or got help. She knew she was the only one who could rescue the prince. So she stepped forward.*

*"I'll go."*

*Her parents, the King and Queen, said: "Absolutely not. It's far too dangerous." In fact, they locked her in her room just to be sure.*

*But there was, in the corner of the courtyard, a young milkmaid, Helen. Helen had always admired Princess Amalia for her gentleness and courage. (It takes a lot of courage not to hurt something you're afraid of!) Helen knew Amalia felt she must go to rescue the prince, so she devised a plan. She took some cheese and milk from the dairy on a tray and went up to Amalia's room, saying she'd brought the Princess's dinner. The guard by the door let her in. Once in, Helen told the surprised Princess that she admired her and supported her decision to rescue the Prince. They switched clothes and the Princess left the room with the empty tray, dressed as the milkmaid, while Helen, dressed as the Princess, stayed in the room.*

*The plan worked, and soon Amalia was off! When the Queen came in later to say good night to her daughter and discovered Helen instead, you can imagine the chaos! In the middle of all the running around and shouting, Helen made her own escape, got a horse from the royal stables and followed Amalia's trail.*

*Well, to make a long story short, they met up and traveled together and became very good friends. They talked to pass the time. They watched glorious sunrises and sunsets together. They got cold and wet and miserable in the rain and snow together. They took care of each other when one got sick or hurt. They talked about their hopes and dreams. Finally, after many good times and bad, they reached the castle of the Prince. The minute Amalia set foot on the castle grounds, she broke the spell and the Prince awoke.*

*Amalia and Helen ran up to the tower to meet the Prince. He was very charming, as all good Prince Charmings are, and they ended up laughing and joking together. Finally the Prince said, "You are my rescuer. Will you marry me, Princess Amalia?"*

*But Amalia looked at him, and then at Helen. "You are very nice and funny and I like you as a friend. But I am in love with Helen. It's better that you find a wife who can love you the way I love her."*

*So, Amalia and Helen rode back to Amalia's land, all the while planning their new life together. Along the way they promised to love each other and take care of each other, just as they had on their adventure. "For better or worse. For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death." That's how they felt.*

*When they returned home from their adventure, the King and Queen wondered where their new son-in-law might be. "Where is the prince—surely you'll marry him!"*

*"No, Helen and I love each other," answered Amalia, "I want to marry her."*

*"But two women can't get married!" cried the Queen and King.*

*"But we've already promised to care for each other and love each other. Why can't WE live happily ever after? What makes our love any different from yours?" asked Amalia.*

*Well, the King and Queen thought about that. And they asked their wise counselors.*

*The counselors came up with lots of arguments as to why they couldn't marry, but Amalia and Helen always had an answer. "We love each other. How can that hurt anyone? We made the same promises to each other that men and women who want to marry make. Why is it different for us?"*

*Well, the King and Queen finally agreed, and since they made the laws, they made a new law in their land—gay people could marry! So Amalia and Helen got married, and as to whether or not they lived happily ever after, well...they're trying hard!*

## \* Where CLF finds itself in the Welcoming Congregation Process

At various points in time since 2001, members of the Church of the Larger Fellowship have undertaken efforts to help CLF achieve official Welcoming Congregation status

<http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/welcomingcongregation/index.shtml>.

Each time these efforts have not come to fruition largely because no one has been able to figure out how to fit CLF, a church without walls, into the Welcoming Congregation program that was very specifically designed for brick and mortar churches.

This current effort came about when another small group of CLF members formed a committee to begin the official Welcoming Congregation process this past fall. The committee was chaired by a UU seminarian and a Director of Religious Education. They, too, hit the wall early on in trying to figure out how to adapt the official program to fit into the specific CLF situation. They enlisted Reverend Lynn Ungar's support and she in turn expanded the circle of people involved in this process, to include Senior Minister Jane Rzepka, Executive director Lorraine Dennis and ministerial intern, Dan Kane.

We then asked Lois Reborne, in her capacity as a CLF Board member to join in this process. We all conferred and shared our thoughts, opinions and suggestions as to how we might make it past the structural hurdle to actually get a process underway that would support this important work and how we might get around the limitations that have historically blocked progress in the official process.

We all began our conversations from a place of recognizing the fact that being "welcoming" and "affirming" of GLBT folks, families and their concerns is woven into the very fabric of the CLF itself. Hence participating in the Welcoming Congregation Program is not as much about making the CLF a welcoming congregation as it is confirming and institutionalizing that fact. We are seeking official recognition of what we all already know is a fact.

Lynn Ungar then began a dialogue with Keith Kron, Director of the UUA's Welcoming Congregation Program, about how CLF could obtain the Welcoming Congregation designation in order to formalize what we already know to be the truth. Keith's response was that in his mind the issue was "If you really want to be on our list or not, then either the Board or the membership would have to vote to become a Welcoming Congregation." Since CLF is unique in the Unitarian Universalist Association as being the one congregation in which the Board calls the minister, we reached the conclusion that, in fact, the Board should be the entity to vote on CLF's effort to achieve official Welcoming Congregation designation.

## \* Why and how CLF already is a Welcoming Congregation

In order to document the many ways in which CLF is already a welcoming and affirming congregation, we have – with the help of many other CLF staff members – compiled a list of the ways in which we present ourselves as a religious home for those who are GLBT or who care about the ways in which GLBT folks are treated and received.

This body of evidence begins where this presentation began, with *Quest*, our monthly worship publication. The story that opens this presentation appeared in the June

2004 issue of the *Quest* <http://clfuu.org/quest/2004-06.html> that was almost entirely devoted to the issue of same gender marriage. It included, among other things, a very powerful sermon by John Buehrens in support of same gender marriage as well as other reflections and columns in support of that cause. The October 2007 issue of *Quest* <http://clfuu.org/quest/2007-10.html> also featured a cover sermon by John Crestwell, of the CLF Board, in which he talks about his journey to becoming an activist on behalf of the freedom to marry movement.

In between, and beyond these two particular issues of *Quest*, we constantly look for and publish sermons, reflections and articles written by GLBT folks and in support of GLBT causes. As you will learn throughout this presentation, because GLBT folks and concerns are woven into and throughout the fabric of the CLF community, it is difficult to otherwise quantify exactly how many pieces in *Quest* have been authored by GLBT folks or address GLBT matters.

The other publication that CLF is responsible for, *UU&Me*, appears quarterly in the *World* magazine, and is addressed to children and youth ages 7 to 14. It also has had at least one complete issue dedicated to the cause of marriage equality, in the November/December 2004 issue, <http://clfuu.org/uume/0904/people.html> with the cover story entitled “Love Makes A Family.” The story is written by two children of a same gender couple who sued the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the right to marry.

*UU&Me* first brought the issue of marriage equality to the attention of its young readers and their families in its June 2003 issue, <http://clfuu.org/uume/0603/ideas.html> which addressed “Seeking Justice at UU General Assembly.” Another very illustrative example of how *UU&Me* promotes GLBT concerns appears in pieces in which children talk about going to church with other families that have two moms or two dads <http://clfuu.org/uume/0604/people.html> and in games and puzzles in which such families are presented alongside the more traditional definitions and images of parents and families <http://clfuu.org/uume/0604/games.html>.

CLF has also raised, and continues to raise, issues of importance to GLBT folks in its regular, monthly Religious Education materials and publications. In every June issue since 2005, *KidTalk* has included Gay Pride Day in its featured June holidays and holy days and has provided links with photos of Gay Pride celebrations, information on their origins and links to resources for gay teens and adults and their families <http://clf.uua.org/kidtalk/2005-06/index.html> and <http://clf.uua.org/kidtalk/2006-06/index.html>. Additionally, the February 2005 issue of *KidTalk* addressed advocating for the freedom for same gender couples to marry <http://clf.uua.org/kidtalk/2005-02/index.html>; the June 2005 issue dealt with how to stand up for gay rights and how to confront homophobia <http://clf.uua.org/kidtalk/2005-06/index.html>, and; the June 2007 issue discussed homophobia in the context of affirming our First Principle, affirming the inherent worth and dignity of every individual <http://clf.uua.org/kidtalk/2007-06/index.html>.

### CLF Online Resources

CLF’s online resources are also replete with groups, forums and resources that address, welcome and affirm GLBT folks and concerns. The Online Learning Center

provides a forum for the discussion of *Quest* sermons and reflections allowing for further, deeper and more personal explorations of the subjects addressed in them. Additionally the CLF sponsors a GLBT shared interest group that provides a safe and supportive environment for GLBT folks and their allies to share their concerns and experiences with such concerns.

Just this past year, we have had opportunities to support mothers struggling with youth and young adult children around issues pertaining to sexual identity. These were both mothers of gay/lesbian children as well as a lesbian mother helping her children deal with their struggles around their mother's newly discovered sexuality. In addition to these postings, a young woman joined the group to talk about a paper she had written for a college class, in which she talked about herself being a lesbian. The professor refused to allow her to share the paper with her class and she was deeply aggrieved and angered. It was fascinating to see all of the support she received including postings from a couple of educators who posited that perhaps the professor's actions did not come from a homophobic perspective but out of a desire to protect the student from repercussions that she could not possibly have imagined at the time she wrote her paper. These are just a few small examples of the ministry that occurs in the GLBT online shared interest group.

Another online resource that reflects the CLF's welcoming atmosphere is the CLF-L email list. This group is moderated by two lay members of the CLF and is considered the "coffee hour" that one might find in a land-based church. The CLF-L group is open to all who seek to belong and has a non-discrimination policy that welcomes all who are kind, tolerant and willing to ascribe to the UUA's Principles and Purposes. The CLF-L group encounters many members with concerns related to GLBT folks and prides itself on being a forum in which those concerns are safely and supportively addressed.

Two other CLF resources worthy of mention are the Sundays Online and the CLF Lending Library. The sample Sunday Online service that is accessible to any who seek it, through the CLF website, contains a sermon in which Reverend Jane Rzepka discusses the "noble love" of same gender couples in a manner that uplifts it and accords it equal status with the love that underlies any healthy (heterosexual) marriage. The CLF Lending Library is the second Google hit when one enters 'gay and lesbian' in the search box of the CLF website, due to its extensive collection of GLBT-related publications and resources.

### **CLF's Prison Ministry**

CLF's prison ministry is another realm where our welcoming and affirming atmosphere is changing people's lives <http://clf.uua.org/penpals.html>. The CLF prisoner member application inquires about applicants' genders with five possible choices, including male, female, transgender: MTF, transgender: FTM, and other. It also includes inquiries pertaining to theological and cultural diversity and lists among its choices, informational material pertaining to gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender people. Prisoner members also are offered access to written materials from the UUA's Office of GLBT Concerns <http://www.uua.org/aboutus/professionalstaff/identity-basedministries/bisexualgay/index.php> and from Interweave

<http://www.uui.org/prog/interweave.php>, the affiliate organization supporting gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender concerns.

As a person who has corresponded with prisoner members and who is leading an adult religious education course for prisoner members, I can personally attest to the power of our outreach and refuge for our GLBT prisoner members. I have read letters and correspondence from prisoners discussing the life-saving nature of our prison ministry and its open embrace of GLBT folks and concerns. I am presently corresponding with a prisoner who is struggling with his sexuality and with advanced HIV and liver disease. He credits his membership in the CLF's prison ministry as quite literally saving his life.

### **CLF's Membership and Staff**

Similar to its prisoner members, the general membership of the CLF reflects our long-standing mission to provide a safe, warm and welcoming religious community for GLBT folks and their allies. As noted earlier, many of our members identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. People come to CLF because of what they have read in *Quest*, on the CLF website or in other Unitarian Universalist publications. They come to CLF because they know that this is a place where their sexual orientation or gender-identity will not keep them segregated from others or make them otherwise ineligible for the full benefits of membership in this spiritual community.

On a personal note, since beginning here in September, I have encountered many new and long-term CLF members who have joined us specifically because they know this is a faith community where they are loved, respected and able to be themselves. Being themselves is not just about being gay or lesbian, but also about being the parent, family member or friend of a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person.

When it comes to actual numbers of GLBT folks – be they prisoner members, general members, staff or contributors to *Quest*, *UU&Me* or our Religious Education materials, we are at a loss. The CLF has never asked any of its members, staff or contributors to state their sexual orientation or gender identity. This is a point of pride. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are not tokenized or quantified in any way that separates out or distinguishes them from any other types of people who are welcome, welcomed, loved and accepted as full members in the human and CLF communities.

Because of this, I cannot tell you how many GLBT members, contributors, staff or otherwise that we currently have or have had in the recent past. We GLBT folk are woven into the fabric of the CLF and our presence is no more sought after or highly valued than the membership or contribution of employment of any other person. As Lynn Ungar and I (two CLF staffers who happen to be lesbian and gay) have chuckled about several times over the last few weeks, as we ponder how to quantify the CLF's welcoming and affirming environment, it is hard to do so because we are everywhere and in everything. We are in the CLF and the CLF is in us. And now is the time to make that official.