



*Application for Renewal of Welcoming Congregation Status*  
First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit

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Date: July 18, 2015

To: LGBTQ Ministries [lgbtq@uua.org](mailto:lgbtq@uua.org)

Greetings!

First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit is pleased to apply for renewal of its Welcoming Congregation status. We are proud of the measurable achievements we have made in the areas of education, congregational life, and community outreach.

First UU Detroit is a small but growing congregation in an urban area. Our resources are limited but our enthusiasm is abundant. In reviewing the suggested Welcoming Congregation action steps we paid special attention to what we could achieve with available resources so that our action steps would be as effective as possible.

We have kept the congregation engaged and committed through newsletter articles, notices in our Sunday order of service, announcements during worship services and social hour, emails to the church listserv, posts to First UU Detroit's Facebook page and groups and, of course, the congregation's participation in services and events. Written and verbal reports of updates on our Welcoming Congregation campaign have been submitted to the Governing Board each month and the board has responded with enthusiasm and support.

When we originally became a Welcoming Congregation in 1997, we implemented many UUA suggestions for welcome and inclusion. These included: an affirmative nondiscrimination clause in our bylaws concerning membership, inclusive welcoming language in our call to worship, a gay pride flag in our sanctuary, a gender neutral bathroom, annually staffing a table at local pride festivals, services on affirming and inclusion, and commitment ceremonies for members in our sanctuary.

First UU Detroit's experience has been informed by previous interim ministers. We were served from 1988-1990 by an interim minister who identified as gay, and from 2007-2010 by an interim minister whose sexuality changed in the course of her service, transitioning from bisexual towards transgendered.

Moving forward to the present, we launched our educational campaign in 2014 and at our 2015 Annual Congregational Meeting received unanimous approval from the congregation to renew our Welcoming Congregation status. The process has left us spiritually enriched. We believe we have met and will continue to meet UUA guidelines for welcome and inclusion. In support of our application for renewal of our Welcoming Congregation status we submit the following information:

NAME OF CONGREGATION AND MAILING ADDRESS:

First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit, 4605 Cass, Detroit MI 48201

NAME, PHONE NUMBER, AND EMAIL ADDRESS OF THE PERSON SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION:

Kathe Stevens, 313-675-1553, [president@1stuu.org](mailto:president@1stuu.org)

DATE AND RESULTS OF CONGREGATIONAL VOTE FOR RENEWAL:

May 17, 2015 Annual Congregational Meeting – a motion was made that “the congregation of the First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit affirms recognition by the Unitarian Universalist Association as a Welcoming Congregation” followed by a motion to adopt by acclimation, which was approved unanimously.

## *Summary of the Work Done in Service of Renewing Our Status, Specifically What Has Been Accomplished:*

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### EDUCATION:

- Congregation-wide common book read and discussions
- Worship service to educate on marriage equality issues
- Films with discussion
- Recognition of international LGBTQ issues
- Panel discussion on marriage equality
- Participation in U.S. Supreme Court post-argument debrief call
- Presentation on status of LGBTQ equality
- Participation by congregational leaders in the Welcoming Congregation program

### CONGREGATIONAL LIFE:

- Formed a broad-based Welcoming Congregation task force to design and offer programming and monitor progress
- Planned an inspirational and joyful worship service to kick-off the Welcoming Congregation renewal campaign
- Coordinated an LGBTQ-themed vespers service to open up a traditional venue to discuss Welcoming Congregation issues
- Updated affirmative language on our website and in our newsletter to include information about our UUA Welcoming Congregation designation
- Included news and information of LGBTQ/welcoming status in our newsletter and on our Facebook page
- Updated the call to worship to include transgender affirmative language every Sunday

### COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

- Hosted a public forum (marriage equality community conversation)
- Donated the proceeds of a special collection from the congregation to a 501(c)(3) supporting marriage equality
- Strengthened our relationship with a local organization which focuses on social justice including LGBTQ issues (MUUSJN)
- Established contact with a local lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer organization to build a relationship, offer support in whatever ways are needed, and promote dialogue and interaction (Affirmations)
- Provided direct service to local LGBTQ communities and individuals in need (Ruth Ellis Center)
- Acted on justice issues which connected our internal congregational ministry to the larger community (Michigan for Marriage community conversation and U.S. Supreme Court post-argument debrief call; Freedom to Marry National Weekend of Prayer; presentation on the status of LGBTQ equality in Michigan; recognition of international LGBTQ issues)
- Promoted events in the local press and/or other media that reached lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer communities (*Between the Lines* ad and posting on event calendars of Affirmations and LGBT Detroit)

## *Specific Work Done Around Transgender, Bisexual, and Queer Identity and Welcome:*

The genesis of our Welcoming Congregation renewal came in response to a request from the Unitarian Universalist Association for congregations willing to help test a new outreach program. One focus of the testing was to identify a niche for outreach.

First UU Detroit answered the call and in October 2014 a diverse group assembled to begin the testing. Members included the young, middle-aged and elders, people of color, queer people, and both long-time and new congregants. In our first workshop to begin to do the work to identify our niche, we were strongly moved by the witness of a new church member who identifies as queer. Knowing nothing about Unitarian Universalism, but intrigued by the sermon topic on our Wayside Pulpit, she impulsively walked in our door during a worship service and was astounded to hear our opening words in which we affirm that we welcome all. She then caught sight of the gay pride banner in our sanctuary. We heard her exclaim passionately about her feeling of relief and joy at the realization that she finally might have found a faith community in which she was accepted.

At our second workshop in October our continuing discussions resulted in six potential niches to target for growth. In a vote, all but one of the testers chose the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer community (LGBTQ) as our niche. We had a mandate to go forward.

While grappling for a focused way to reach out to our chosen niche, we became aware that renewal of First UU Detroit's Welcoming Congregation status was sorely overdue. Realizing that participation in a Welcoming Congregation refresher course could present not only potential outreach to the LGBTQ community but also offer the opportunity to provide educational programming on LGBTQ issues to our congregation, we requested and received Governing Board [approval to renew](#), along with the board's support to launch our educational campaign.

With the UUA outreach program testing complete, the group morphed into the Welcoming Task Force and began to design an educational program on LGBTQ issues to offer to the congregation, with the ultimate goal of a congregational vote to approve First UU Detroit's renewal as a UUA Welcoming Congregation.

At a December 7, 2014 informational congregational meeting the Task Force presented to the board, and introduced to the congregation, the preliminary campaign to begin our Welcoming Congregation renewal process. The presentation included a brief history of our testing process, including our choice of the LGBTQ community as a niche, a short description of plans for a December 14 kick-off, and our intention to present the renewal to the congregation for a vote at the annual congregational meeting in May 2015. Congregants were encouraged to ask questions, engage in conversation, and provide feedback about the Welcoming Congregation renewal process by seeking out any Task Force member, easily identified by a pride decal affixed to their nametags.



“A Queer Tradition” was the sermon topic for First UU Detroit's [December 14 worship service](#). This service integrated the kick-off of our Welcoming Congregation renewal program with the appearance of the LGBT choir, [Sing Out Detroit](#) and included a detailed presentation of our plan of action steps and an announcement of upcoming educational programs and events.

Representatives of [Freedom House](#) were invited to attend the December 14 service in conjunction with Human Rights Day. Freedom House provides refuge for LGBTQ refugees who are seeking political asylum in the U.S. because they face persecution or worse in their home countries. During the subsequent social hour there was a presentation explaining the work of Freedom House. Petitions advocating social justice nationally and internationally were available to be signed, and the Freedom House residents were introduced, welcomed, and honored.

The “Curiously Odd Movie Night” (a monthly fundraiser for the church) on December 21 featured a showing of [Tokyo Godfathers](#), about a trio of homeless people – a middle-aged alcoholic, a teenage runaway and a transgendered woman and former drag queen – surviving as a makeshift family on the streets of Tokyo. The post-movie conversation was focused on transgender issues, and how they are exacerbated by homelessness.

About this time, the Welcoming Task Force began collaborating with the Worship Committee to update First UU Detroit’s Call to Worship. The Worship Committee was enthusiastic, since it had observed that some visitors respond to the words “gay, lesbian, and bisexual” during the Call to Worship with positive comments of feeling included. When the Worship Committee understood that transgendered individuals were left out of the Call, a welcome to “people of all sexual orientations and of all gender identities” was implemented in January 2015.

Our January 14, 2015 monthly Vespers featured a [wide variety of LGBTQ poets and poetry](#). Interspersed with the poetry was music from lesbian singer k.d. lang. We were pleased that our wide circulation on social media about the theme of the January Vespers brought in non-congregant attendees. A traditional post-Vespers dinner included discussion about LGBTQ issues and art.

Over 20 members and friends participated in a [book discussion on January 25](#). The discussion centered on Audre Lorde’s essay, “There is No Hierarchy of Oppressions,” from [Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays, and the Struggle for Equality](#) (author: Eric Brandt), and essays by Rev. Michael Tino, “Saved by Love,” and Rowan McDowell Thompson, “Love May Not Be Concerned” from [Coming Out in Faith: Voices of LGBTQ Unitarian Universalists](#) (editors: Keith Kron, Susan Gore). The participant introductions turned intensely personal and connecting. Time ran out before we could begin to discuss the essays and, at the request of all who attended, the Task Force happily agreed to schedule another discussion.

On February 22 about a dozen people participated in the second session of our book discussion – an excellent turnout considering the frigid temperatures and icy road conditions. But the discussion was hot and the engaged participants continued the discourse and nurtured the desire to inform and connect.

The “Curiously Odd Movie Night” for March 10 featured a showing of [Iron Ladies](#), the true story of a men’s volley ball team from Thailand made up of gay and transgendered players coached by a lesbian. Conversation after the documentary allowed an opportunity for another discussion on the challenges facing the transgendered.

In March 2015, the First UU Detroit Young Adult Group (UUYA) completed “Genitals for Justice,” an anatomy project for the [Ruth Ellis Center](#), a youth services center and shelter for at-risk and homeless LGBTQ youth. The Center offers drop-in services, health counseling, and a safe space for queer youth, as well as residential services. It was in need of youth-friendly props to explain sexual health to young people. UUYA saw this as a unique opportunity to match its creative skills





with a cause with which we are aligned. Members of UUYA collaborated over many months to make a comprehensive, 24-piece crocheted set of genital and sexual organs to be donated for use in the Center's informational health sessions, with another set in the works. These props are especially important for the Center as it serves many trans-youth with limited access to information about sexual health. The collaboration has also placed First UU Detroit as a resource for other projects and events for the Ruth Ellis Center in the future.

Our [March 29 worship service](#) featured [Ken Mogill](#), one of the attorneys in the Michigan marriage rights lawsuit. Mr. Mogill's topic, "Reflections on the Struggle for Marriage Equality," was a personal examination of what marriage is and how the *DeBoer v Snyder* case has affected people's views of marriage as a matter of law and social/religious conceptions. Over 70 people attended and gave Mr. Mogill a standing ovation. Mr. Mogill was available during social hour to continue to address issues and answer questions about his work and the ongoing work to achieve equality in marriage for Michigan residents.

A special collection taken at the marriage equality service netted over \$400 for the [National Marriage Challenge](#), the 501(c)(3) authorized to fundraise for the *DeBoer* marriage equality lawsuit.

After the March 29 worship service, [Michigan for Marriage](#), a statewide grassroots public education campaign to build support for marriage equality, sponsored a community conversation on marriage equality. The discussion included [Gina Calcagno](#), the Campaign Director of Michigan for Marriage, [Andre Gifford II](#), a graduate of the [LGBT Detroit](#) leadership academy, and First UU Detroit's own [Irene Brisson](#) – who graciously had agreed to participate when we were confronted with the sudden withdrawal of a previously-scheduled panelist. Over 30 participants listened intently to the panelists' personal narratives, asked searching questions, and offered their own personal and poignant stories.



The event was covered by local and regional news stations and a topical quote was played on the air by WWJ Newsradio 950 as well as featured in its [online news](#). The importance of this news coverage was not lost on the Welcoming Task Force: later in the week a Task Force member was told by a person with whom she had an appointment that the person had heard the radio broadcast. He revealed that he was gay and began asking questions about our advocacy of equal rights, reinforcing our belief that having our voice heard by those outside our faith will inspire others to seek answers about Unitarian-Universalism.

First UU Detroit joined over [200 congregations and faith communities](#) participating in [Freedom to Marry's](#) National Weekend of Prayer. A [responsive reading and a prayer](#) were incorporated into the [April 26 worship service](#) to support the legal teams, the plaintiffs and all American families in anticipation of the U.S. Supreme Court's deliberations on April 28.

Immediately after the U.S. Supreme Court deliberations, we participated in a Michigan for Marriage-sponsored post-argument [debrief](#) conference call with legal experts from the ACLU of Michigan to hear what happened and what was expected next.

At First UU Detroit's [May 17 annual congregational meeting](#), we distributed a written summary of our educational efforts, congregational offerings and community outreach and events to date, and opened the floor to the congregation for feedback. Task Force members offered to meet in small groups or individually to have further conversation about goals the congregation may have or suggestions for outreach and inclusion. The congregation voted unanimously to affirm recognition by the Unitarian Universalist Association as a Welcoming Congregation.

In celebration of [Motor City Pride](#), on June 7 [Prof. Peter Hammer](#) presented "Behind the Times: The Struggle for LGBTQ Equality in Michigan," based on Prof. Hammer's 12/7/2014 [Jurist article](#), "Mich-issippi Burning: Marriage Equality, Anti-Gay Animus and Majoritarian Politics." Prof. Hammer, Professor of Law and the Director of the Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights at Wayne State University Law School in Detroit, not only gave an update on the dismal shape of equality in Michigan, encouraging action on the part of all who were there, but also shared his personal story of his struggle to obtain justice. The presentation was followed by Q&A and the 25 attendees asked piercing questions and offered compassionate comments.

Members of the Task Force and other First UU Detroit congregants attended a screening of "[TREASURE: From Tragedy To Transjustice, Mapping A Detroit Story](#)" at the Detroit Film Theater on June 18. Presented by Friends of Detroit Film Theatre and the Ruth Ellis Center, "Treasure" is a [documentary](#) about the murder of a 19-year old trans woman, Shelly "Treasure" Hilliard, whose murder involved the criminalization of sex work and transphobia and a young Detroit trans community activated by her death. We were proud that the "Genitals for Justice" crocheted by the First UU Detroit Young Adult Group were prominently displayed in the lobby of the theater.

The Welcoming Task Force gratefully accepted donations from its members and the Governing Board, supplemented by funds from the budget, to place advertising in the June print issues of [Between The Lines](#). The ads ran in the 2015 annual "Motor City Pride" issue as well as a "Special Decision" issue, published the day after the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on marriage equality.



As part of our focus on outreach and potential partnership with local LGBTQ organizations, we connected with [Randy Block](#), Director of the [Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network](#) (MUUSJN) to mine Randy's wealth of experience as well as his contacts and information on other organizations with which we might form connections. We are proud that First UU Detroit Governing Board Trustee and chair of its Social Justice Committee, [Joel Batterman](#), was elected to the MUUSJN board in April 2015, strengthening our connection.

Members of the Task Force also met with the Executive Director of [Affirmations](#), metro Detroit's community center for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their allies. As a result, our church was invited to membership in Affirmations' [Faith Alliance](#). Task Force members are now representing First UU Detroit at Faith Alliance meetings and providing leadership to develop a program to increase the number of congregations and churches that are part of the alliance to provide faith services to members of the LGBTQ community.

UUYA member [Nathan Strickland](#) is guiding a process for First UU Detroit to become a formal ally of [LGBT Detroit](#). Nathan is the Health & Wellness Coordinator as well as a member of the [Young Adult Board of Advisors](#) at LGBT Detroit.

First UU Detroit is listed on the [Welcoming Congregation page](#) of the [Institute For Welcoming Resources](#).

*The Steps Taken and Continued to be Taken to Identify and Address Areas Where We Can Deepen Our Welcome of People of All Races, Ethnicities, Economic Status, Abilities, Ages, Sexual Orientations, and Gender Identities:*

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We understand that education on LGBTQ issues – or any and all issues of equality – is an ongoing process. Our faith tradition calls us to be open and seeking and intentional at church, at home, and in our community. In order to ensure that we are welcoming all and affirming the diversity that enriches us, with the support of the Governing Board, committee chairs and the congregation, we aspire to undertake the following short-term actions:

- Help to test the UUA Word Press template during the month of August 2015 in order to position ourselves to be able to update our website in the near future so that it will be easier to feature priorities such as LGBTQ issues in a more visible manner and so that we may be more nimble in adding current information
- Collaborate with the UUYA to organize a group to attend a volunteer orientation at the Ruth Ellis Center and, subsequently, to sponsor a clothing drive for donation to the Center
- Work with UUYA member Nathan Strickland to explore the possibility of establishing an [Interweave](#) chapter at First UU Detroit
- Partner with Social Justice Committee to strengthen our current connections with LGBTQ organizations and to continue to advocate for equality
- Work with Worship Committee to schedule LGBTQ-themed services to ensure that [issues and history](#) of marginalized persons are regularly part of our services and educational programs throughout the congregational year, especially [transgender issues](#)

We aspire to the following long-term actions:

- Partner with the Worship Committee to provide worship coordinators, worship leaders, and speakers with guidelines on inclusive language, especially for the [transgendered](#)
- Partner with the Planning Committee to develop [inclusive language guidelines](#) for congregational leaders
- Partner with the Membership Committee to provide [welcome and inclusion training for Sunday greeters](#) and to update our brochures and social media
- Work with the Governing Board to update the by-laws to reflect inclusive language in hiring practices
- Pending the availability of funding, continue to advertise in the local press and/or other media that reaches lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer communities (*Between The Lines*) and/or arrange for a public service announcement in the local press and/or other media that reaches lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer communities (non-commercial radio stations whose audience is our demographic)
- Prepare for a settled minister by organizing a [Beyond Categorical Thinking](#) workshop which, in addition to issues of gender, race, disability, ethnicity, mental health, class, age, and size, addresses sexual orientation and gender identity
- [Screen a film](#) sponsored by the [Religious Institute](#) in honor of LGBTQ Pride
- Present workshops as suggested by the UUA, *e.g.*, [Living the Welcoming Congregation](#) or Interweave's [bisexuality and transgender curriculums](#) or utilizing Institute for Welcoming Resources, or LGBTQ Ministries' [Identity 101](#) or [Nurturing Inclusivity](#)

We aspire to the following potential connections:

- Reach out to LGBTQ groups at Wayne State University [Medical](#) and [Law](#) schools (First UU Detroit is on the campus of WSU)
- Reach out to LGBTQ groups at [Chrysler](#), [General Motors](#), and [Ford](#) automotive companies (Detroit is a center for the automotive industry and we hope to enlist the aid of congregants employed at the Big Three)
- Build partnerships with nearby congregations in other denominations who are also committed to LGBTQ welcome using the Institute for Welcoming Resource's [map tool](#)

In conclusion and candor, we want to mention a few impediments we are working on to address and overcome. Our congregation has been meeting our short- and long-term financial obligations head on resulting in a restricted budget for paid publicity. The Task Force worked diligently to get out the word on our events by posting in free event calendars, on community listservs, Detroit newspapers and e-zines, and social media.

Another impediment is venue space. Several years ago we donated our buildings to a local non-profit in return for an agreement that allows us to worship in the building in perpetuity. However, without a budget to rent space from the non-profit building owner, we are limited to scheduling events in the sanctuary. We cannot offer the church buildings to outside groups for their use as we have in the past.

Thank you for your attention to our application. We welcome your feedback and support and look forward expectantly to the approval of the renewal of our Welcoming Congregation status.

Respectfully submitted,

*First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit*