

## WELCOMING CONGREGATION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### WHAT IS THE WELCOMING CONGREGATION?

The Welcoming Congregation (WC) program was initiated at the 1989 UUA General Assembly in order to educate its members on GLBT issues. The WC program is a completely volunteer program for congregations that see a need to become more inclusive towards bisexual, gay, lesbian and/or transgender people. In the fall of 2000, we at the UUFM saw this as a way to begin to become more inclusive, to help end exclusion and reduce prejudice on sexual orientation, and toward ageism, ableism, racism or any of the other forms of oppression that divide people. We completed this process in June of 2006.

### HOW WILL BEING A WELCOMING CONGREGATION BENEFIT ME?

From the UUA Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Concerns: “Confronting our prejudices in a non-judgmental, non-threatening group allows us to explore their origins and offers an opportunity to replace those prejudices with knowledge. Understanding our prejudices leads to individual spiritual growth and congregational unity.”

### WHAT DID WE DO TO GET THE WELCOMING DESIGNATION?

We sponsored a program consisting of a series of workshops developed by the UUA. The goal of the workshops was to reduce prejudice by increasing understanding and acceptance among people of different sexual orientations. We also worked on including and addressing the needs of GLBT persons at every level of congregational life: in worship, in programs, in social occasions, and in rites of passage. We added inclusive language and content in our worship and changed our bylaws to recognize our affirmation of GLBT persons and nondiscrimination in all dimensions of congregational life. Other efforts included movie nights, OWL (Our Whole Lives) trainings and classes and supporting Gay Pride Day and World Aids Day. We voted unanimously to become an official ‘Welcoming Congregation’ at our annual meeting in May 2006. Living the Welcoming Congregation, a new self-paced program just developed by the UUA, will be one of our next steps.

Our Four steps were:

1. **Voted on the resolution** from OutFront Minnesota, allowing OutFront MN to use the name of our church to oppose any constitution amendments barring the legal recognition of same-sex couples. The resolution states:

**“We oppose any amendment to the Minnesota Constitution that prohibits marriage, civil unions and/or legal protections for same-sex couples.”**

As a committee, we are excited to join other UU congregations in the effort: “UUs Out for Marriage!” begun by some UUs in the Twin Cities, in conjunction with OutFront MN, to add our voice to help bring a statewide UU moral voice to this effort to keep this amendment off the ballot next year.

The resolution was passed unanimously- 45 to 0!

2. **Attend the Community Action Training** to work for same-sex marriage rights held at Minnesota State University-Mankato in February of 2006.

3. **Wrote a Valentine** to our legislators on 'Love Sunday' Feb. 12, 2006. The RE children designed Valentine cards on which we wrote a brief note, signed, and sealed with a rainbow or marriage sticker, then sent in bulk up to St. Paul.
4. **Attended the Workshop Series on Sunday mornings from 8 to 10am**, for 7 weeks beginning on February 19<sup>th</sup>, and running through April 2, 2006. Workshop dates and topics were:
  - February 19: Introductions and Expectations: Why are we here? Goals, definitions, fears and gains
  - February 26: What we Know and How we Learned it
  - March 5: Common Elements of Oppression
  - March 12: Religion and Homosexuality, led by Rev. Lisa Friedman
  - March 19: Experiences of LGBT- panel
  - March 26: How Homophobia Hurts us all and Gender Socialization
  - April 2: What Now? Reflect on what we have experienced and learned and strategize on what we will do next

### **FUTURE PLANS**

As part of the Social Action Committee, we will continue our efforts with the new curriculum from the UUA, Living the Welcoming Congregation.