



# Welcoming Congregation Initiative

for the Unitarian Universalist Society of River Falls, WI  
UUSRF / N8010 State Hwy 65 / River Falls, WI 54022 / 715-425-5115

## *Our Purpose*

Believing in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, our intent is to develop an awareness, promote education and support members, friends, and visitors who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender. Our goal is to become an officially sanctioned “*Welcoming Congregation*” by fulfilling the commitments outlined in the Welcoming Congregations Program detailed by the Unitarian Universalist Association.

## *How do we do this?*

A Welcoming Task Force, under the Social Action Committee, has been meeting since spring of 2008 to plan worship services, educational workshops, a film series, religious education programming, community outreach and visual arts to attain our objectives. Listed below is the schedule for the first four months:

Times: Sunday services @ 10:30 a.m.      Friday Films @ 7:00 p.m.      Wednesday Workshop @ 7:00 p.m.



Sept 14, Sunday: Rev Nancy Holden - Sermon on social justice. “A Knock at the Door”



Sept. 26 – FILM “Anyone and Everyone” followed by group discussion (Barb)



Oct. 5 – Sunday: Rev. Ted Tollefson - Sermon on Family Values



Oct. 8 – Workshop #1 “Intro & Expectations) after monthly potluck supper (Rev. Tollefson & Jillian)



• Oct. 24 – FILM “Laramie Project” followed by group discussion (Nancy)



Nov. 9 – Sunday: Rev. Meg A. Riley, Director, Advocacy and Witness Programs, UUA



Nov. 21 – FILM “Coming Out Proud”, workshop #2 & 4 (Brian and BB)

What we know and how we learned it/gender socialization and homophobia



Dec. 3 – FILM – “Rent” followed by group discussion (Willow)

## *How long does this take?*

The process to become a Welcoming Congregation can take several months or a few years depending on various factors. Our hope is to be able to apply for this status by the summer of 2009. Having said that, we plan to be flexible in our timeline, so that we can thoroughly address the topics and be confident in meeting our objectives.

## *Task Force Members*

BB Brown; Brian Copp; Willow Gallagher; Barb Glidden (chair); Rev. Nancy Holden;  
Jillian Nodland; Rev. Ted Tollefson

Please feel free to contact any member with questions or email us @ [uusrfwelcoming@yahoo.com](mailto:uusrfwelcoming@yahoo.com)

*Please see reverse side for 20 questions we plan to discuss throughout the series.*

# *Twenty Questions about Homosexuality*

Compiled by the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force

Edited by Rev Ted Tollefson

1. What is homosexuality?
2. How is homosexuality or heterosexuality determined? Does it change?
3. What percentage of people we know is homosexual?
4. Is homosexuality healthy? Who decides?
5. Is homosexuality a matter of choice: Can it be changed?
6. What causes homophobia?
7. Are gay people easily identified?
8. Is homosexuality natural? Who decides?
9. Is homosexuality moral? Who decides?
10. How is heterosexual love similar to homosexual love? How is it different?
11. Does homosexuality threaten “the family”? Does heterosexual love threaten “the family”? Does sexual infidelity threaten “the family”?
12. Do gay people molest or recruit children?
13. Can lesbians or gay men be good parents? How could we tell?
14. Does **our** society discriminate against gay people?
15. Should gay men and lesbians be barred from certain jobs?
16. Should there be laws governing private sexual behavior between consenting adults?
17. How does the lesbian and gay movement relate to other human rights movements?
18. Do GLBT gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender people have special insights about the human condition?
19. Should homosexuality be publicly discussed?
20. Should gay people come out? Under what circumstances?

**QUESTION 1: What is homosexuality?**

Homosexuality, or homosexual, is a term used to describe feelings or behavior, and it is also used to describe individuals who have feelings of love, emotional attachment, or sexual attraction toward people of their own gender. Unfortunately, sexuality isn't as cut and dry as one is either a heterosexual or homosexual as it has become evident through studies that sexuality is more of a continuum of feelings. Furthermore, people are not limited to a set of behavior patterns, which restrict them or assign them to a particular category for life. Some individuals who prefer romantic attachments to members of their own gender do not use the word "homosexual to describe themselves since it seems to them to refer solely to sexuality and their orientation means far more to them than that. These men and women prefer to be called "gay." The origin of the term "gay" is unclear, but it was used for many years as an "insider" term by homosexual men and women, and it gained currency as the one word which was self-chosen and not used by outsiders as a term of abuse. The word "gay" has gained universal acceptance and has now become commonly used by society.

**QUESTION 2: How is homosexuality or heterosexuality determined? Does it change?**

There is no known cause of homosexuality. "Behavioral scientists reject the notion that either heterosexual or homosexual orientation is a simple matter of choice." Most rule out constitutional, genetic, glandular, hormonal or parent-child relationship explanations. Rather, research suggests that human sexuality is unfocused at birth and development to a preference is a matter of complex learning and experience. Further, 'most researchers now acknowledge that the causes of both homosexual and heterosexual orientation are not known, but many believe that basic sexual orientation is set at a very early age, probably by the time a child begins school, though these inclinations may not be recognized and acknowledged for many years. However, these inclinations do not radically change.

**QUESTION 3: What percentage of people we know is homosexual?**

Self-acknowledged lesbians and gay men still face serious discrimination, so many do not "come out," openly revealing their sexual orientation. The only extensive surveys were conducted by Kinsey in the 40s and 50s. He found that 13% of men and 7% of women were predominantly homosexual for at least three years of their lives between the ages of 16 and 55. This means that more than 10% of the population had a significant homosexual dimension in their adult lives. Later studies gave similar results. If 10% is accurate, then 20,000,000 Americans, or one child in every five families is gay

**QUESTION 4 Is homosexuality healthy? Who decides?**

Most health professionals agree that the essential test of mental health is whether or not a person is able to maintain a generally smoothly functioning life. Following this test a strong majority of the research conducted agrees that sexual orientation does not determine the quality of mental health. Recent studies have noted that GLBT people do suffer higher rates of stress related mental disorders. These rates are not at the levels of a pathology, but are strongly linked to ongoing discrimination (American Journal of Public Health Vol. 91, No. 11). In accordance with the findings of original research the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its' list of mental disorders in 1973. The American Psychological Association followed suit in 1975. When the decisions were ratified resolutions calling for the inclusion of sexual orientation in civil rights legislation. The American Psychological Association added language to their resolution calling for its' members to lead the way in removing the stigma associated with homosexuality. Since then a number of the other major American medical professional organizations, including the American Medical Association and the National Association of Social Workers, have issued statements supporting gay rights in all areas of health. Those groups, along with the American Academy of Pediatrics, have recently spoken out against bans on gay adoption & foster care.

**QUESTION 5 Is homosexuality a matter of choice?**

Homosexual feelings – affectional, emotional, or erotic attraction to persons of one’s own gender – are not a matter of choice. Neither are heterosexual feelings. And neither is the basic sexual orientation which is established in early childhood. Choice however does enter into the question of what one does in response to one’s feelings or basic orientation. One can decide whether and how to act upon them and how to integrate them into the context of one’s life. Can it be changed? There is enormous social pressure (including being mocked, imprisoned, and burned at the stake) for people to repress their homosexual feelings or deny their basic orientation, and to adopt a heterosexual lifestyle. Some have tried to change by employing techniques from willing practitioners (reparative therapy) denying or repressing true feelings at whatever cost to our psychological well being. As a result a very small percentage of those did manage to change overt behavior – but in no instances have the changes been documented for more than 5 years and there is no evidence that either homosexual feelings or sexual orientation have or can be changed. The question we need to ask is “Why should we change?” For most the disadvantages of social non-conformity are far outweighed by the advantages of accepting and taking pride in who we are as whole human beings.

**QUESTION 6: What causes homophobia?**

Homophobia is the irrational and persistent fear of homosexuality, which often manifests itself in extreme rage reactions to homosexuals. People who are homophobic often explain their fear and rage by offering what they believe to be rational reasons; that homosexuals are "crazy" or "disgusting". But homophobia is not limited to people who believe these myths and mental health professionals have begun to look more deeply into its causes. As they examined the character profiles of homophobic individuals, researchers noted that a very high proportion also had prejudicial feelings against other minority groups, holding rigid and traditional views about most other social issues, particularly as it relates to the roles of women and men. From this profile it can be deduced that homophobia stems from the same dread of the different or unknown that marks racial or religious prejudice.

Additionally, there is also the presumed challenge to one’s own lifestyle and strict conforming behavior. Rage and anger are sometimes the defense against such a challenge. Another trait discovered by researchers in a majority of homophobic individuals is the importance they attach to denying or repressing their own homosexual feelings. Again, for such people, fear and rage are an automatic reaction to those who say, "It’s alright to have homosexual feelings." Most homophobic individuals are not looking for a cure but those who might start by examining the facts and deciding for themselves whether fear and rage are appropriate reactions. They could take time to examine the principle of cultural diversity and might also recognize that almost everybody has had homosexual feelings which aren’t a sign that anything has gone wrong. Homophobia can be cured in our society but may persist until people are no longer afraid of their own homosexual feelings. The time that takes will not only take its toll on those with homophobia but also on homosexuals who are oppressed and persecuted as well as on heterosexuals who are impacted by restricted relations. All things considered, it’s not only gay people have a stake in curing it.

**QUESTION 7 – Are gay people easily identified?**

Our culture has rules by which gender is identified, but these rules or norms change over time. Fifty years ago men never had long hair or wore jewelry and women never wore jeans or slacks. There is a tendency to think that gay people don’t follow the rules, so anyone who does not fit the stereotypes must be gay. But stereotypes never apply to all and cannot be trusted. In fact, no one can tell who is or isn’t gay by outward appearance. Transvestites who assume the clothing and mannerisms of the opposite sex are often seen as homosexuals, but this may not be true. Trans-sexuals are people who do not consider themselves homosexual, but rather feel that they are “in the wrong body.” With medical and psychological help, some of these persons undergo sex-change therapy and surgery. True homosexuals believe that acknowledging their orientation does not require them to look in any special way or to conform to any stereotype. Rather, it frees them to just be their true selves, to look and behave naturally

**Question #8 – Is homosexuality natural?**

Attitudes and beliefs about sexuality are culturally relative—that is, what one culture considers “unnatural” may be perfectly acceptable in other cultures. Anthropologists and historians have established the fact that homosexuality has been seen as perfectly natural and good, or even preferred as a worthy form of sexual behavior in some cultures. They have also found that bisexuality is the norm in a majority of cultures, and it is only in strongly biased cultures like ours, that exclusive homosexuality or heterosexuality is common. When people label as “unnatural” sexual acts other than male-female coitus, they are expressing their belief that the purpose of sex is procreation. Like any other gift, sex can be abused, but modern ethics sees sexuality as an expression of love that can deepen and strengthen the relationship between two people, adding joy to each life.

**Question #9 – Is Homosexuality Moral?**

The influence of a particular culture shapes the definition of morality most people live by. Religion also plays a big role in shaping our concepts of what is morally right or wrong. In the U.S. a majority of Christians believe that their definition of morality comes from the Bible, but what the Bible says about sexuality is confusing, contradictory, and out of date. It is ironic that in a nation based on the separation of church and state, some religious groups have insisted on imposing their views of sexual morality on the lives of others. This irony and injustice have been understood by an increasing number of religious leaders and organizations. More and more are asking the important question: Is it moral to oppress people because of who they love? There is no single path to a moral life.

**Question #10 – Is homosexual love the same as heterosexual love?**

Everybody understands that love relationships aren’t just about sex. Whether heterosexual or homosexual, this holds true. Love, caring and sharing, responsibility and commitment are the necessary elements of lasting relationships. The things that make people love each other are not biological equipment, but personality and character. Gay couples have suffered from misconceptions about the nature of their relationships, and been denied the privilege of expressing affection in public. Now some of the misconceptions have been disproven and people have been given the chance to see homosexual love all around us as a normal part of our world. It should be clear that gay couples face the same problems and joys as any other two people who just love each other.