

2025 July 20 Worship Service Reflection
Bill Ratcliffe
Are Unitarian Universalists Religiously Queer?

Are Unitarian Universalists Religiously Queer? As pointed out by Karishma Gottfried, "Unitarian Universalism is a queer faith, defined not by a creed passed down through generations but by the real-world commitments we make to each other, in the present." This by definition is a covenantal faith. So, as UUs, we are religiously queer or at odds to what is normal to narrow and literal perspectives, which would include anti-faith or strict ideological faiths. Our UU faith community is positioned in the right place to be an oasis for those seeking a positive connection, whether they be queer or religiously queer. Connection, love and living as a whole person does not have been obtained at the expense of accepting a binding dogma. Fear is replaced with hope.

As a straight but not narrow old guy who is trying to be inclusive, I am striving to accept that I am religiously queer. I was raised during a time when

the term queer was a pejorative and one of derision. But many gays, lesbians and trans folk have embraced this label. This modeling has forced me to accept reality and to change my worldview. In these intolerant times, UUs embrace "others" instead of demonizing them. Our Oasis on Clarke is a safe and secure home for Pflag and Trans*London who are very grateful that they have finally found acceptance. This makes us religiously queer as many other places of worship deny them a home. The overwhelming existence of regressive populist perspectives makes the progressive perspectives of Unitarian Universalism religiously queer. Our paradoxical faith of radical inclusion with limits and our positive progressive worldviews, striving for equality rather than greater inequality, reinforces the aptness of this label. At the core of our Unitarian Universalist faith is the idea that my truth and your truth can both be true, even if they contradict each other. Answering the call of love instead of the call of hate, further adds to

our religious queerness. Acceptance of being religiously queer is a process which will be different for us as individuals. The perspective that we don't all have to think or feel alike, to love alike, is a central perspective. It's all part of Daring to be - Unitarian Universalist.

It is our UU faith community that really makes us religiously queer. Sure, we have vibrant social and social justice activities. Still, we are more than a place to make friends, eat together and stand up for social justice issues. We are a Unitarian Universalist faith community that holds up that which is worthy in our Worship Services, guiding us to be more faithful Unitarian Universalists. Thus, we become more whole persons. If our faith or what we put our trust in doesn't keep changing, then we are not an antidote to regressive populist perspectives, which are against communities and for more inequality as well as more fear. Being religiously queer leads to a more balanced life.

Accept that Unitarian Universalists are treated as the other, especially by regressive populist perspectives. Being progressive and inclusive with limits makes us religiously queer. I have and am experiencing this discrimination both within and beyond our UU Congregation. Unitarian Universalism strives to treat everyone as a whole person and not as a problem. A beloved UU faith community matters. Many who are Unitarian Universalist without knowing it, are searching for a welcoming community which will accept their whole selves as they evolve and grow in their personal positive faith. For too long, many of us have had to hide who we truly were in order to be accepted. May our Oasis on Clarke be an oasis for all who seek connection and acceptance. Let us become a faith community that lives the spirit of the oneness of being and the oneness of humanity. There must be a future for the only UU faith community in the London area. Acknowledge that our hybrid Unitarian Universalist faith community is at odds with most

religions. Yes, even religiously queer. As Elton John has said, "I just wish more of my fellow queers would come out sometimes. It's nice out here, you know." For religious queers, the same sentiment applies. As we enter dark times, hope will come with there being more UUs at odds with what is being accepted as normal.

Victoria Safford relates that "People ask me sometimes, "Is this a gay church?" It is a privilege to answer: "Ours is absolutely, gladly, hopefully and humbly, gaily, a gay church, a gay tradition, where everyone, including heterosexual members and friends, is welcome, where everyone is needed, where everyone's experience is cherished as a sacred text, because no one's experience of living or loving can be comprehensive, because each of us holds clues the others need about how to live with dignity and joy as a human person, and none of us knows enough about that yet, to be considered whole." This uncertainty partnered with collaboration is what makes a UU faith

community odd or religiously queer. Worshiping, meeting, expecting joy, being of service, relating, and welcoming in person, shows that our UU Congregation and Meeting House matters. At a time in our UU faith community when we are facing a volunteer crisis, we must welcome all who want to be of service, modeling that work is love made visible. It is accepted that our incompleteness requires others to help us grow.

Earlier, I pointed out that uncertainty and paradox is part of our Unitarian Universalist faith. Our UU Principles are conditional. One example is the fourth Principle, "A free and responsible search for truth and meaning". The condition of being responsible challenges us to not knowingly hurt or disrespect anyone. Making assumptions on a situation or a person is resisted and reflected upon before commenting or acting. We can't assume what a person identifies as, until they let us know. Until then, let the mystery be! Respond to the spirit of what is being

communicated, not the letter. Use facts as a source of greater understanding, not as a weapon. A question asked in anger of a guest is disrespectful. If these perspectives are not odd or queer compared with many religious faiths then I don't know what is.

This is Pride Parade Sunday. Come walk with us, or, if not possible, cheer us on in the spirit of "Happy Pride", as allies of the LGBTQ+ communities. Be mindful that our UU faith community has been a long time LGBTQ+ ally. This is another example of Unitarian Universalism being religiously queer. Some other faith communities have caught up but arrived late.

In closing, embrace being religiously queer. Our covenantal, evolving and welcoming beloved UU faith community has been and is, a faithful ally of the LGBTQ+ communities. Strive for a balance between the individual and a UU faith community that matters.

Let's live our progressive populist faith perspectives and worldviews. Strive for a more equitable and accepting world that replaces fear with hope. Let us build a future where our UU faith community really matters. Let's prepare to answer the call of love and walk with those who are at odds with what is normal. Dare to be Unitarian Universalist.

Let it be.