

On October 26, the Welcoming Congregations Refresher Committee held the first of a series of events designed to help our congregation become more welcoming to LGBTQ members, friends, and visitors. This first gathering was to understand some vocabulary. Language is powerful, especially to those who have been oppressed, afraid to express themselves, or without words to adequately describe their lives. Common language helps us not only understand one another but also to show support for one another, and be more welcoming to all.

The service that day brought up the concept of gender neutral pronouns and choosing one's preferred pronoun. The idea is new to many that we should not automatically assume someone's gender, but it is important to honor and embrace all identities, and recognize that gender identity is fluid for some. Some people prefer to be referred to as "he/him/his" or "she/her/her" while others prefer gender neutral pronoun like "they/them/their" or "ze/zim/zir" or "zie/hir/hir." As a way of respecting one another's preferred pronouns, Rev. Tino encouraged everyone who wanted to participate to write their preferred pronouns on their name tag after the service. If you are comfortable with this, it helps everyone know what you want to be called and sends a clear message to visitors and friends that we want to respect their pronoun preference as well.

At the workshop after the service, participants reviewed assumptions that are prevalent in our society so that everyone understood we are all coming from a place of learning and growth. We also agreed to keep confidential anything personal shared in the group. Then we looked at some vocabulary. Attached here is the long list of definitions we used to guide our conversation. Many of the words are familiar but many more are not. Our participants shed light on nuances between definitions, described new uses of words and descriptions preferred by some, discussed ways in which words empower or disenfranchise, and shared personal stories. It seemed that everyone learned a lot and felt more confident about their understanding of LGBTQ concepts. However, we only got through the first side of the page before our hour was up!

We feel like this was a great way to continue the conversation and work of being a Welcoming Congregation. Stay tuned for our workshop coming up in the new year to finish the vocabulary discussion and an upcoming session with a panel of "experts" for an insightful conversation. In the meantime we will continue to update you with LGBTQ topics with a focus transgender issues. Here is a link to resources we have been collecting including articles, videos, and a chart of various pronouns and how to pronounce them if you want to learn more. We encourage anyone with questions to submit them to the rainbow striped Question Box in the fireplace room. We will answer them in this newsletter blast.

We have started what we envision to be a two-year process of conversations and workshops. We look forward to your participation and input.

The Welcoming Congregation Refresher Committee:

Ellen Calves (chair), Tyler Videla, Chris Ferricane, Miranda Mottola, Gayle Mottola, Vicki Bloom, Michael Hardiman, Tracy Breneman, DRE and Rev. Michael Tino