

# Authentic Selves: Celebrating Trans and Nonbinary People and Their Families

December 1, 2024

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Our congregation was certified in 1997 by our national UUA office as a Welcoming Congregation. Designated as a Welcoming Congregation means that as a congregation, we are committed to be intentionally inclusive and affirming of LGBTQ+<sup>1</sup> individuals. As a congregation we are committed to actively work towards creating a safe, welcoming and supportive environment for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Being a Welcoming congregation signals to the wider world that ours is a safe and affirming space for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Here at UUSL we have an active Membership Committee, chaired by Carol Jerry.

Over the past few months, our Membership Committee has begun to examine whether or not it is time for us as a congregation to undertake a Welcoming Congregation Renewal process.

There are a number of reasons for us as a congregation to consider such a Welcoming Congregation renewal process.

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<sup>1</sup> Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning.

One is that we received our Welcoming Congregation status 27 years ago. A lot has changed since that time, both within society, the UUA world, and within our congregation in terms of LGBTQ+ issues and rights.

Within our congregation there are a number of new members who never gone through the certification process, and who most likely could benefit from learning more about what it means to be a Welcoming Congregation.

Another reason is when our Membership Committee, a very dedicated group of folks, looked at our UUSL By-laws – we realized that our UUSL By-Laws need to be updated to encourage inclusivity.

And one more reason is that we, as a congregation, have integrated so well those among us who are gay and those who are not gay that it is hard for newcomers who are looking for a LGBTQ+ home to realize that yes, this is a safe place for them to worship and belong and find people who support them.

The Membership Committee asked me to preach this morning about this possibility of renewal, so, I am going to do so, by sharing with you about a important book entitled Authentic Selves by Peggie Gillespie.

The UUA highly recommends that we all read this book,

-all Unitarian Universalists and friends across our faith.

I concur, as I learned a great deal about how best to celebrate and support trans and nonbinary people and their families in this time of societal upheaval, where there are hundreds of bills across dozens of states in the US, seeking to harm transgender and nonbinary adults, children and their families. By some accounts, around seven hundred and twenty-five bills were introduced in state legislatures in 2023 seeking to infringe on LGBTQ+ American rights.<sup>2</sup>

Bills that would prevent access to gender-affirming healthcare, prevent trans children from playing on sports teams, deny access to bathrooms and locker rooms.

There are bills that would criminalize parents for making informed, loving, and very private decisions.

There are bills that prevent teachers from even mentioning sexual orientation or gender identity in the classroom.

On July 22 of this year Governor Sununu signed into law two such anti-trans bills, here in New Hampshire. Health care measure HB 619 prevents trans minors from receiving transition related surgery and bars physicians from referring patients for out of state procedures.

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<sup>2</sup> Nico Lang. *American Teenager*. New York: Abrams Press, 2024. P.3.

It does not ban other forms of gender-affirming care, such as puberty blockers and hormone replacement therapy.

The other bill will bar some students from competing on school sports teams that match their gender identities<sup>3</sup>.

These two bills will take effect at the beginning of next year.

I suspect many of us have been following the stories of trans youth competing in sports events,

especially whether trans females competing in girls and women's sports have a competitive edge.

Right now, there is a federal lawsuit against the Bow Schol District here in New Hampshire, regarding allegations by the protestors of violation of their First Amendment rights during a silent protest against transgender athletes competing in girls' sports.<sup>4</sup>

The Bow superintendent, Marcy Kelley vehemently defended in her testimony last week the right for the transgender student to play without harassment and intimidation aimed at a particular student.<sup>5</sup>

There are recent discussions in the news about whether or not the drugs trans women take counter their male hormones,

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<sup>3</sup> [N.H. governor signs bills restricting trans health care and sports participation](#)

<sup>4</sup> Concord Monitor. Srutni Gopalakkrishnan. *Officer dropped as defendant*. 11/01/24.

<sup>5</sup> Concord Monitor. November 23, 2024. *Bow: Pink armbands should be banned*.

and thus, truly level the playing field.

Current research is lacking definitive answers on this issue.

There are scientific articles published

which indicate that before puberty

difference between males and females are small or non-existent.

During and after puberty, the gap in performance widens,

but testosterone suppression in trans females

can narrow that gap over time.<sup>6</sup>

After about one year of taking hormone replacement therapy,

the competitive advantage begins to even out,

although there is some confusion

about just how long this takes to happen.

Science may not be able to answer this question definitively,

as the number of trans youth participating in sports is so low.

What is true is that like any 13 or 14 year old who loves to play sports,

most trans girls just want to play softball or swim on the swim team.

The message that they can't play in sports

sends trans youth a negative message about who they are at a time in

life when peer group acceptance and developing good self-esteem

is so very important.

What is the definition of a transgender person?

Our UUA gives us this definition as part of a study guide

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<sup>6</sup> Boston Globe, November 20, 2024 Do trans female athletes competing in girls and womens' sports have a competitive edct? By Kay Lazar, Danny McDonald, and Neena Magen.

to the book *Authentic Selves*:

Being transgender means having a gender identity and/or expression different from what is culturally associated with the sex the person was assigned at birth.

Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation;

Transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual or any other orientation.<sup>7</sup>

About 1.6 million people in the US identify as transgender.

Of these, about 1.3 million are adults 18 years old or older.

300 thousand are youth, ages 13-17.<sup>8</sup>

A 2021 study by UCLA School of Law (the Williams Study) stated that 1.2 million people in the US identify as non-binary.

A 2021 study of the Trevor Project, the world's largest suicide prevention and mental health organization for young LGBTQ+ people, estimated that about 11% of all LGBTQ+ youth identify as non-binary.

The UUA definition of nonbinary is neither identifying exclusively as either a man or a woman. Nonbinary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, as being somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories.

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<sup>7</sup> *Authentic Selves*. UUA handout 1-2: Some Definitions. [http://www.uua.org/lifespam/curricula/read/authentic\\_selves](http://www.uua.org/lifespam/curricula/read/authentic_selves).

<sup>8</sup> [1.2 million nonbinary people live in the US, a new study says | CNN](#)

While many nonbinary people also identify as transgender, not all do.<sup>9</sup>

As anti-transgender rhetoric and legislation has increased in the United States over recent years, unfortunately, so has anti-transgender violence,

The Human Rights campaign tragically reports that today the rate of violent victimization against transgender persons is 2.5 times higher than among cisgender persons.<sup>10</sup>

In 2023 32 transgender and gender expansive individuals were killed.<sup>11</sup> 84% were people of color and 50% were black transgender women.

Annually, November 20<sup>th</sup> is a Day of Remembrance for those tragically killed because of their gender identity.

Tragically, the suicide rate for trans and non-binary young people ages 13-24 are reported to have an increase in 2024 of suicide attempts at 38-44 %.

The political talking points against trans and non-binary people, especially youth, most likely has been, at least part of the cause of such a high rate of suicide attempts.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> UUA Definitions 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights campaign. <https://www.hrc.org/> 2024

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights campaign. [HRC | Fatal Violence Against the Transgender and Gender-Expansive...](#)

<sup>12</sup> The trevor project.org. Suicide Prevention for LGBTQ\* Young people.

Almost all of the stories in the book *Authentic Selves* are about trans and non-binary people who felt at a very young age, that they were not aligned with the sex assigned to them at birth. Story after story in this book documents this well. What arises from these stories is the understanding that being trans or non-binary for those reporting in this book is not a choice, but a felt sense, deeply understood, of who one is.

For some whose stories are told, she, he, they were very fortunate to have loving families and friends that accepted their new identities. For others, their stories are those of great hardship, as they had to hide their identity for many years before becoming their true selves.

One such story is that of Blake Alford, born in 1948 in Atlanta Georgia. Growing up in a time when there was little information about being transgender, Blake was bullied at school because he was considered “different” from the other girls. His parents, Southern Baptist in their religious beliefs, struggled mightily to accept who Blake is, despite being told by a doctor when they sought help for their child, that Blake was a homosexual, and they needed to accept this. They did not really ever accept this about Blake. At school he was told over and over again that if he were to dress like a girl, he wouldn’t be tortured by classmates.



Blake kept saying: “I’m dressing as best as I can as who I am”

He adds today that that never got him anywhere.

He had a gym teacher who was lesbian, who let him shower in her private shower room, and also sat with him on bus trips so that he could safely play the sports he loved.

Looking back on his youth, Blake today believes that his church didn’t want him there because they labelled him as a homosexual.

His pastor’s sermons were frequently about “those sinning homosexuals.”

Blake at the age of sixteen, felt so rejected, that he left his home and hitch hiked to Atlanta.

He eventually, reconnected with his father, who helped him go to truck driving school,

He earned his living this way, as a long-haul truck driver.

One day he just had enough of going into a women’s public bathroom and being asked, “are you sure you are in the right bathroom?”

He then announced to his friends that his mother was gone, his father was gone,

and he was going to transition into the man,

in his words, “I have always been.

It’s finally time for me to be me.”<sup>13</sup>

Authentic Selves is filled with such stories told by real people who are trans or non-binary.

There are pictures of each of them, as well as stories and often pictures of their family members and friends.

I admire the courage of everyone who contributed to this book.

It is a great resource for anyone who is trans or non-binary, or has a person in one's life who is.

As I do.

My son, Wade, the oldest of four, has given me permission to share with you my current experiences as a mother of a trans person.

In truth, it's all very new for me.

Wade is now 59 and in the process of transitioning.

He was, in my mind, as his mother, identified as female and heterosexual until he went to college at Antioch in Ohio.

He came home from college one day and told me he was a lesbian.

At that time, I surprised Wade by totally accepting him as a lesbian.

Of course, internally, I was adjusting to Wade's new identity, grieving for a while the loss of the young girl I thought I had raised, and then letting that go, as I opened myself to who Wade was for many years.

About five years ago, Wade asked me to use "they" pronouns and changed his birth name to LJ.

Some of you heard Wade, a Quaker minister,  
preach here a few years back as LJ.

Wade then asked me to use “they” pronouns when referring to him,  
as he was continuing his search for his authentic self.

In truth, I had trouble with the “ they” pronouns at my age,  
but I did my best to honor Wade’s wishes, and he got that.

About two years ago Wade told me that he was in the process  
of becoming male in his gender identity.

He again has changed his name this time, - to Wade,  
and is undergoing hormone replacement therapy.

He has told his siblings, all of whom love him.

I have never seen him so happy.

What is most important to me is that Wade  
feels accepted, supported and loved,  
No matter what his sexual or gender identity.

It’s a clear message in the book *Authentic Selves* –  
for parents and siblings and friends to honor the identities of their  
trans and non-binary children and adults.

I am very grateful for this book, as it helped me better understand  
my son’s journey and the journey of anyone struggling with their  
sexual and gender identities.

I do hope we as a congregation

will renew our Welcoming Congregation status,  
for a lot has changed since 1997.

I also hope we will place a pride sticker on our sign out front,  
and explore other ways for us to be more welcoming.

Most of all, I hope we will uphold our UU principle  
of the Inherent Worth and dignity of every person,  
as well as continually put Love at the center of our lives.  
And thus, welcome wholeheartedly  
those coming to us, seeking a safe place to worship  
no matter what their identities.

Peace and love to you.

