AFFIRMING AND DEFENDING OUR TRANSGENDER (AND GENDER N0N-CONFORMING AND FLUID) NEIGHBORS, YOUTH AND FRIENDS

Rev. Scott W. Alexander

Johnna Swendsen

Unitarian Church North

Sunday, January 26, 2025

SCOTT INTRODUCES JOHNNA SWENDSEN COMING IN ON ZOOM FROM VERO BEACH, FLORIDA

This morning, Johnna and I will be sharing in a **"Chancel Dialogue"** conversation about her complicated journey into her fullness and authenticity as a transgender person…and what it is like being a transgender person in this troubling and hateful time in American culture when Transphobia (and aggressive attempts – both governmental and cultural – to deny Transgender rights, identity and freedoms) are on the rise. This conversation takes on added importance in the

wake of the terrible and hateful Executive Order attacking transgender persons which newly inaugurated Donald Trump signed on Monday…more on that terrible development in a moment.

I wanted Johnna to join us this morning to share both her personal story and her wider cultural/political perspectives with all of us this morning, in the hope we (as Unitarian Universalists, will all be better informed allies in the struggle to affirm, protect and celebrate transgender and "non-binary" people.

But before Johnna and I dive into all this, let me begin this morning by reminding us all of two foundational religious affirmations:

[THE FOLLOWING IS PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN]

LET'S BEGIN THIS MORNING BY REMINDING OURSELVES OF THESE TWO FOUNDATIONAL AFFIRMATIONS:

1) ***THE FIRST AND FOREMOST PRINCIPLE OF OUR UNITARIAN UNIVRSALIST FAITH IS "The Inherent Worth and Dignity of Every Person…which is our "moral and ethical staring place with all human questions…and***
2) ***"The Golden Rule"… "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" –*** **humanity's nearly universal religious and philosophical ethic of justice, compassion and inclusion.**

These foundational beliefs in the sanctity and beauty of every human being – which flow directly out of our Judeo-Christian roots as a religious tradition defines – defines our faith…and shapes our response to everything human! And the key point to this foundation of who we are as Unitarian Universalists (and caring human beings) is that **THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS TO THIS INCLUSIVE AND COMPASSIONATE RULE….NONE!**

[PREVIOUS SLIDE WITH FIRST PRINCIPLE AND GOLDEN RULE COMES DOWN OFF SCREEN]

But sadly today in America (as you all know) an increasing number of so-called and self-defined ***"conservatives"*** – political, cultural and religious – are trying to persuade the culture that transgender (and gender-non-conforming and gender fluid) persons (which according to the **Williams Institute** currently describes approximately **1.4 million adult Americans**…and many more younger people) are by their fundamental nature and humanity – to be **excluded** from human respect, validation, rights and protection.

Most concerning is the fact that in just the last few years, conservative legislators in no less than 33 of the 50 states (mostly in the **"Deep South"** and ***"Fly over country"*** in Middle America) have aggressively proposed legislation to restrict or outlaw basic rights and protections afforded other Americans. Since 2020 several hundred **anti-trans bills** have been proposed (and dozens sadly signed into law) blocking – among other things – gender-transition medical care (for both adults and minors)…and the gender-self-identification (the right to change your

legal name and/or birth certificate or to use the bathroom that conforms with your identity.

And just this past Monday – I am very sorry to say -- immediately after his inauguration, Donald Trump couldn't wait to sign a far-reaching and mean-spirited Executive Order recognizing only ***"two sexes"***…which he defined as (and now I quote the order directly) ***"male and female based on the reproduction cells at conception."*** This order further directs Federal agencies to:

- Only issue government documents showing people's sex ***"at conception"…***
- stop using ***"gender identity"*** or ***"preferred pronouns"*** in Federal contexts
- to ***"maintain women-only spaces"*** in Federal prisons and shelters…and deny federal funds for prisoners seeking gender transition medical procedures
- and (to top it all off) to eliminate **Federal employment protections** for gender identity and sexual orientation.

We are entering a sad time when Transgender (and non-binary and gender-fluid persons) are under direct (and broad-based) attack from the Federal Government on down.

The first thing I believe we need to understand (as we work to combat this hate and ignorance in our culture and government) is how complex (and nuanced) are the issues and realities of Gender identity and sexual orientation.

[PICTURE OF "WELCOMING CONGREGATION" POSTER IS PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN]



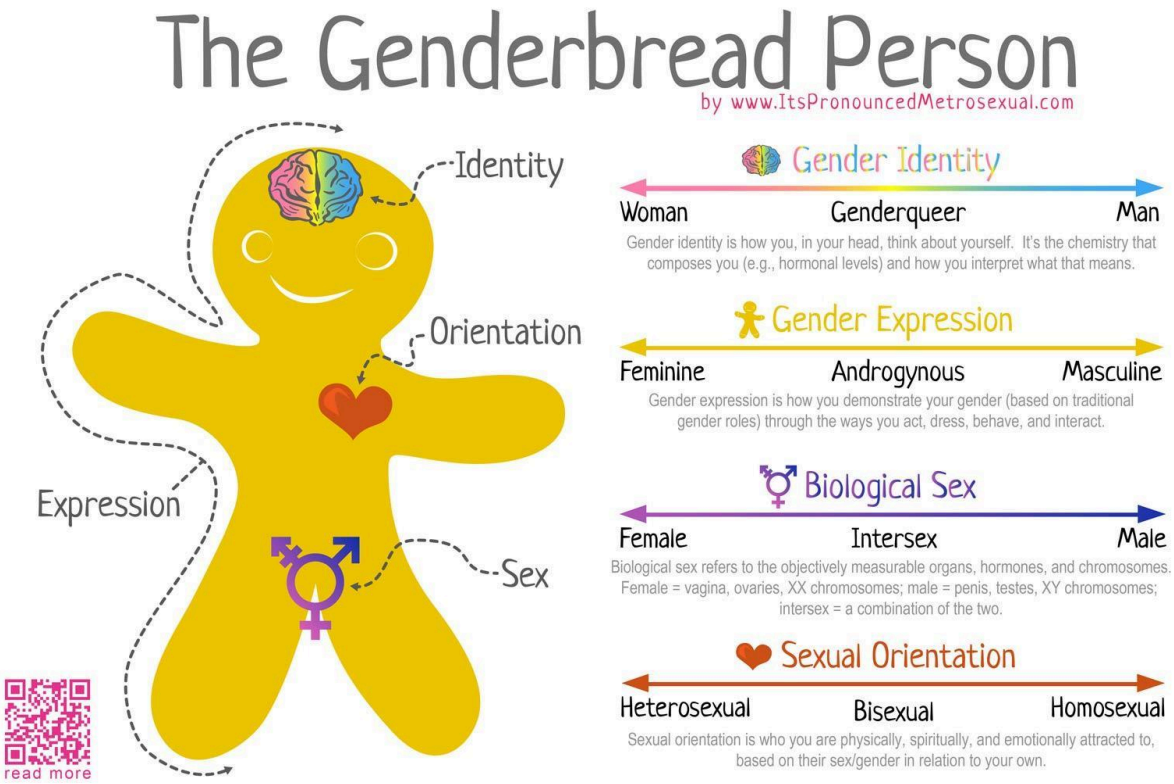
Some of you may not know that for almost a decade in the 1990s, I lead our denomination's efforts on **LGTBQ** rights…including conceiving, authoring and initiating our nationwide **Welcoming Congregation**

Program which UCN participates in -- to this day. So I come to this conversation with a great deal of background, experience, and knowledge.

To help me make all these complexities (regarding gender identity and sexual orientation) a bit clearer, I want to show you a graphic entitled ***"The Gender-Bread Person"*** which describes some of these realities:

[The "GENDER-BREAD-PERSON" GRAPHIC IS PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN…PLEASE MAKE THI9S AS BIG AS POSSIBLE]

https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/1600-Genderbread-Person.jpg



As you can see from this Graphic (and I realize this may be a bit hard for some of you to read from your seats, but I will walk us through it) when you are trying to fully understand and appreciate the interwoven nuances of human sexuality and gender identity you need to understand (for starters!) that there are **4 distinct (yet possibly interrelated and co-mingled) realities when it comes to gender and sexuality:**

1) **Gender Identity** (how you **self-identity** in terms of your gender)

2) **Gender Expression** -- how you **express** yourself in terms of gender – along the traditionally articulated masculine/feminine continuum

3) **Biological Sex** -- what **measurable organs, hormones and chromosomes** you physically have… and…

4) **Sexual Orientation --** who you are **physically, spiritually and emotionally attracted to** based on their sex or gender in relation to your own.

So when people talk about the **LGTBQ "Community"** they are talking about a **CONSTELLATION (and a continuum)** of realities and identities that cannot be correctly understood by lumping them all together.

Let me just give one example of this. Many so called "Conservatives" think of transgender people (who, like Johanna) choose to transition to their more authentic gender selves) as **"Gay"**…when in fact their more to **a more authentic gender identity**

has nothing at all to do with **their sexual orientation.** This is why I believe we need to be very careful when we talk about the "***LGTBQ COMMUNITY"*** When we use this phrase, we are lumping together the words Gay, Lesbian and bisexual (which all refer to sexual orientation) with Transsexual and Queer -- which more accurately refer to gender identity and expression. As we delve further into issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, please keep this ***"Gender-bread Person"*** graphic in mind…for when it comes to all these complexities, ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL!

CHANCEL DIALOGUE BETWEEN REV SCOTT W. ALEXANDER AND JOHNNA SWENDSEN

Alright, Johnna, welcome to Unitarian Church North here in the "frozen Tundra" of Wisconsin (😊). We are so glad you are with us today, as we all try to educate and inform ourselves further about transgender issues.

1)First, can you begin by describing your long path of transition from male to female?

[Johnna speak from the overhead screen…for a few minutes…Rev. Alexander may (?) at some point interject to ask a further question or make a comment…including "how has your birth family reacted to your transition?"

THE PICTURES OF JOHNNA AS John Swendson – WHICH WOULD BE SHOWN FIRST -- AND AS A PIN-UP CAN BE SHARED IN THIS SEGMENT…WE WILL CALL ON THE A/V PEOPLE TO PROJECT THEM AT THE APPROPRIATE MOMENT





Johnna at a "Pin-Up" national event

at some point Rev. Alexander may ask – with Johnna's permission -- "So now that you have transitioned to you full and natural and fabulous female self, how do you understand your sexual orientation – which is a separate life issue from one's gender identity?]

2)After you moved to Vero Beach, you came to our UU congregation…what was that like and

why did you stay to become such an integral part of that congregation?

[Johnna speaks…Rev. Alexander may (?) at some point interject to ask a further question or make a comment]

3) Living in Florida, you have had to endure the hateful and aggressive politics of that conservative-dominated state, including direct attacks on transgender identity, rights and freedoms – including youth -- by the governor (Ron DeSantis). As a transgender citizen and activist, what is your message to your fellow citizens (and your Governor) and how are you striving to make a difference?

4) Johnna, before we close, I want to bring up an area of concern and uncertainty for many Americans…it concerns youth who self-identify as transgender or gender fluid. As many Americans, I believe there are legitimate (and still evolving) questions about the **timing** and

wisdom and **scope** of **GENDER-TRANSITION MEDICAL CARE** (including hormone therapy and gender/altering surgery) for persons under 18 years of age…and the questions surrounding parental consent for minors. What do you personally think about these complex questions?

CONCLUSION OF CHANCEL DIALOGUE

Rev. Alexander will thank Johnna and conclude the ***"Chancel Dialogue"*** – reminding the congregation that, as Unitarian Universalists we all have a duty to and role in affirming the ***"inherent worth and dignity of all persons"***…and the need for us (in these times of increasing transphobia and homophobia) to be "counter-culture" in pushing back on the ignorant hate being expressed by so many Americans/states toward our transgender friends, family, athletes and youth. **SO…LET'S GET TO WORK ON BEHALF OF OUR**

TRANGENDER FAMILY, FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS AND YOUTH…AND NEVER BE AFRAID TO SPEAK UP IN THEIR DEFENSE.