



UPLIFT

Monthly Trans/Non-Binary Gathering Space

4th Tuesdays @ 8pm ET / 5pm PT

Pastoral Groups—Second Week of the Month

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Opening Words

Spirit that runs through us all, help me to remember all the ways in which I am connected to others. Remind me to look up, to reach out, to find those doing this work alongside me and join them.

Rev. Aisha Ansano



Schedule

- Who are trans/nonbinary UUs and what do they/we need?
- Program elements
- The past two years
- Praise for the program
- Plans for the future
- Resources
- Questions



Who are trans/nonbinary UUs?

“The majority of trans UUs:

- are **non-binary**;
- are **queer, pansexual, or bisexual**;
- have one or more **disabilities**;
- are **young adults**;
- are **white**;
- and attend a UU **congregation** at least once a month.”

Source: 2018 TRUUsT Report on the Experiences of Trans Unitarian Universalists
<https://transuu.org/truust-report/>



Who are trans/nonbinary UUs?

“When compared with the Unitarian Universalist population as a whole, trans UUs:

- are far more **low-income** (almost half do not have enough income to meet their personal needs),
- are more likely to have been **raised UU**,
- are **younger**,
- and are more **racially diverse.**”

Source: 2018 TRUUsT Report on the Experiences of Trans Unitarian Universalists
<https://transuu.org/truust-report/>



Lack of spiritual connection and care

- “Only 44% of trans UUs feel **spiritually connected** and nourished at their congregation—and only 15% feel *strongly* spiritually connected.
- Only about half of trans UUs who have a UU minister feel comfortable seeking **pastoral care** from them.
- A majority of trans UUs who attend a congregation **feel responsible for education on trans identity** or concerns.”

Source: 2018 TRUUst Report on the Experiences of Trans Unitarian Universalists

<https://transuu.org/truust-report/>



Lack of inclusion

- “72% of trans UUs *do not feel* as though their congregation is completely inclusive of them as trans people.
- [I.e, **Only 28% of trans/nonbinary UUs feel as if their congregation is fully inclusive** of them as trans people.]
- Higher levels are experienced by those who are most financially insecure (89%), people of color (85%), young adults (84%), and non-binary people (82%).”

Source: 2018 TRUUst Report on the Experiences of Trans Unitarian Universalists
<https://transuu.org/truust-report/>



Marginalization

- **42% of trans UUs regularly experience trans-related marginalization in UU spaces.**
- Higher levels of trans-related marginalization are experienced by those who are most financially insecure (74%), people of color (54%), non-binary people (53%), and disabled folks (48%).”

Source: 2018 TRUUsT Report on the Experiences of Trans Unitarian Universalists
<https://transuu.org/truust-report/>



Reasons for leaving

“Other than moving away, trans UUs have left UU congregations most often due to:

- **trans-related marginalization;**
- **other identity-related oppression** such as racism, classism, ableism, and ageism;
- hypocrisy;
- unfulfilling worship/spiritual experiences;
- and **abuse or bullying.**”

Source: 2018 TRUUsT Report on the Experiences of Trans Unitarian Universalists
<https://transuu.org/truust-report/>



Questions/Reflections on the Data

- Do you have ideas about what could improve spiritual connection and care for trans/nonbinary UUs?
- What is contributing to trans & nonbinary exclusion in our congregations?
- What could help increase trans/nonbinary experiences of inclusion & acceptance in congregations?



What do trans/nonbinary UUs need?

- Work to increase **inclusion in congregations**.
- **Affinity spaces** where we can connect without external experiences of transphobia.
- Support for trans/nonbinary **religious professionals**.
- Direct **mutual aid** and support.
- **Children and youth, as well as trans, nonbinary and intersex adults**, need additional support as **legislative attacks** worsen. Their families, including parents/guardians, need support too.



What do you need in order to best bloom and be in the world? What would nurture, sustain, or help you feel whole, loved, or cared for today?





What happens in the gatherings?

1. Welcome children/youth, orient everyone to space
2. Opening words and music
3. Word cloud check in
4. Game, story, or other interactive connection time
5. Ritual, meditation, poetry, sermon, etc.
6. Breakout groups
7. Return to space with music
8. Report back, closing question
9. Closing words and music
10. (Sometimes) Trans/Nonbinary Dance Party!



Planning the gatherings

Meeting planning:

- Drop in space facilitated by consultants/staff
- All UPLIFT attendees are invited each month
- Time to think about the most recent gathering & decide on theme, brainstorm words/music/activities for the gathering
- Meeting planners are then invited to help facilitate/otherwise take part in leading the gathering that month



Accessibility

- Commitment to full access & inclusion, rooted in our values of love & inherent worth and dignity of all.
 - Started with significant access & continue to grow with feedback from community.
 - Continually using creativity to create programming that invites people in.
 - Pastoral support available during the gathering time
- Check out Accessibility Notes read at gathering [here](#).



Children & youth support

- Thanks for the support & strategic collaboration from Lifespan Faith Engagement! (Shoutout to Evin Carvill-Ziemer and Jennica Davis-Hockett)
- Following UUA Safety Guidelines & using permission forms from UUA youth programming
- Caring, open/trusting, supportive drop-in youth/child space



Choosing music and words

- Trauma informed
- Child/youth friendly
- Relatability/not generalizing in a way where people may feel left out
- Checking for oppressive language
- Considering whether using this piece may involve appropriation/tokenization of BIPOC trans/nonbinary authors/musicians
- Checking for accessibility of content



Questions/reflections on program elements

- Please ask clarifying/follow-up/just for curiosity questions!



The Landscape in 2020

- TRUUST capacity was limited during a pandemic, especially as a volunteer-run organization with a small budget.
- **TRUUST is specifically for trans/nonbinary professionals.**
- **There was no programming geared towards trans/nonbinary UUs** who are laypeople, congregants, raised UU, or other non-professionals.
- This was something we had needed and wanted for a long time but hadn't successfully started yet.
- When an opportunity for a ministerial internship with Michael opened up, I saw this as the chance we needed to jumpstart this programming.



Starting the Gathering Space

- **We launched in October 2020**, building off of the GA trans gathering space in June 2020.
- We launched 3 weeks after Adrian started in their role, knowing that the programming was necessary & that we would be building the plane while flying it.
- **In the first few months over 300 people signed up.**
- The first few gatherings had 60-80 participants of all ages.
- We worked with Evin Carvill-Ziemer and others in Lifespan Faith Engagement to ensure that **all ages could attend**.



2020-2021 Fiscal Year

- Michael served as a chaplain for the space. Shana Aisenberg provided music & regular support at planning meetings & we had guest preachers. Laura started volunteering regularly with the space in the spring.
- We had CART captioning available from the start.
- We worked hard to create a connective space that worked on Zoom for this number of attendees that was **fully accessible** as well.
- Development of all ages trans/nonbinary musicians' playlists.
- Adaptation of games for all ages, accessible, on Zoom.
- **Volunteer monthly planning meeting** helped shape the agendas each month.



2021-2022 Fiscal Year

- Over the course of the year, we gained a **500-person list of registrants**.
- The gatherings had an average of 20-40 participants of all ages.
- **Community Formation Consultants** E.N. Hill and Laura Conkle joined the team, along with regularly contracting with Shana Aisenberg on music (and, increasingly, facilitation).
- Developed many ideas for our **covenant**, which is now in draft form.
- Created an informal covenant among leadership and discussed a need for leadership structures.
- Over the past two years, accumulated an anthology's worth of **poetry and music by trans musicians and artists**.



2021-2022 Fiscal Year (continued)

- Explored **church management systems** and worked with Jennica Davis-Hockett, Emily Cherry, and Laura Conkle to try one out.
- Alongside Jennica Davis-Hockett, developed a training program for **adult supports to work with youth** & started onboarding. At end of the year, brought in Steven Williams as youth consultant.
- Started planning to create a **BIPOC affinity space**.
- Started working with TRUUsT to plan a **pastoral care program** to run as a companion program to the space and provide additional emotional support.



The Landscape in 2022

- Facing threats from anti-trans legislation.
- Trans/nonbinary UUs continuing to experience significant marginalization in congregations
- Lots of trans/nonbinary youth in congregations, not enough practical support for children, youth, & families
- Strong gathering space, significant needs outside the space



Questions/reflections on the past 2 years

- Please ask clarifying/follow-up/just for curiosity questions!



Praise for the gatherings from participants

“We could all very much agree that being here together with so many others like ourselves was a very affirming thing. It does indeed feel safe. And good.”

“It fed my soul.”



What will you be bringing with you from here into your summer?

fashionable beloved comfort
ijustgotheresoidkbuttransnessiguess
peace transness <3 breath wholeness
community belonging
justice connection activism rest
play love care hope idk energy smiles sense
"you you-deserve-to-live spirit guess purpose energy live deserve
joy steadfastness genuine desire
friends companionship groundedness self-compassion
open-hearted-connection



Praise from Rev. Stevie Carmody

“The programming was interactive, accessible, soulful, and fun! One of the best online spaces I’ve been to in a while!”

- The way you both have approached **youth safety** in an online space is exemplary.
- Your approach to **access** also had a lot of integrity. It’s clear it’s something that all the leaders are taking responsibility for. There’s a strong culture around access there.
- The way you’ve encouraged **shared leadership**... Things were really well planned out, and... the message of approachable and valued leadership shone through in how the night progressed. The team is proud of the work they are doing together.
- I had a wonderful time helping facilitate the children and youth breakout room. It was so affirming as a space, especially around neurodivergence. And **there was a lotta joy there**.
- Adrian and Michael, I know you know that this ministry is so vitally important. But I just want to reflect that I know it too. You are living out our values with so much integrity and creativity. I have so much gratitude for this work, and I hope that we can continue to support it!”



What's something that you enjoy about the gatherings, if you've gone?





Dreams for the Future

- Accountability systems for congregational harm/conflict
- Affinity spaces
- Staff capacity to build up the program
- Mutual aid
- Continued support for & integration with ministry offerings of advocacy/activism addressing anti-trans legislation
- Pastoral care and mutual aid
- Governance system



Questions?

Resource roundup for Trans Day of Visibility:

<https://www.uua.org/lgbtq/blog/transgender-day-visibility>



**Closing Question: a hope,
commitment, or feeling I have for the
UPLIFT gatherings**





Closing Words

*i dream of our return. to
wholeness, to knowledge beyond
words, of love, of compassion.
and i am dreaming with the*

*persistent magic of becoming
who we always could be, wanted
to be and dreamed of becoming.
wake up, wake up.*

*all is not lost. it is time to work,
but also, as ever, you must learn
the wisdom of your dreams.*

*-let them
and us.*

Excerpt from “let them and us” by
Rev. Soto



Thank you for joining us!