



UU Congregation of Phoenix

February 2019

Inclusion



VIEW OF DISABILITY IN THE UUA ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION MINISTRY (AIM)

Disability is a Social Construct

Variations in how our minds and our bodies work are part of the vast range of human diversity, and contribute to individual uniqueness. Society determines which of these variations are considered “typical” and defines the rest as disabilities. These definitions are fluid over time and across cultures.

Approximately 20% of Americans today live with disabilities. Disabilities may be physical, cognitive, sensory, or psychological, or categorized in other ways [i]. They may be visible or invisible. A person may be born with disabilities or acquire them later in life. Many people have multiple disabilities. Many people do not consider themselves to have a disability, even though their body or mind does not fit within the range defined as “typical.”

Most medical and legal definitions of disability are couched in terms of defects and deficiencies, rather than variation. This perspective can serve to reinforce the social stigma, inequality, isolation, and marginalization experienced by people living with disabilities.

Generally, society is set up to include those who fall into the “typical” range. Those of us who, for whatever reason, fall outside of that range, often find it up to us or our families to create ways to be included.

The AIM Perspective

Accessibility and Inclusion Ministry considers the uniqueness of the individual as a gift to be valued and appreciated by our congregations. AIM Congregations accept a responsibility to counter society’s tendency to make inclusion and accessibility the responsibility of individuals, and instead transform our congregations and our society to be welcoming and inclusive of people of all abilities.

A Welcoming To Inclusion

By Jonathan Lifshitz

Hello my name is... Jonny Lifshitz. I use the male pronouns of he, him, his. When my wife Carrie and I first attended Unitarian Universalist services 15 years ago, we were warmly welcomed by smiling faces, each with name tags around their necks. To me, this was an intentional action that expressed a willingness to share; a willingness to get to know one another. If we know something about a person, just their name, then preconceived notions begin to melt away. It becomes easier to start a conversation: "I have a relative with the same name!" "Tell me about your name." UUCP has taken further steps to accelerate conversation and welcome each of us by presenting our preferred pronouns on our name tags. What great information to open a conversation, using words that welcome and invite.

As one part of our vision, we work towards being radically inclusive. As a member of the board, we commit to living into inclusion. As a member of the inclusion team, joined by Larry Reed and Vince Waldron from the board, I work to empower each of us to be a smiling face, a welcoming conversation, and a part of our community. I find the opportunity at hand and ahead to be radically different from an approach of political correctness. Being politically correct means using words that don't offend others, however the tone used to express words can be more hurtful than the words themselves. Over the past 5 months, I have heard our son Dylan refine his speech oratory on profanity, where in 10 minutes he can take neutral words and make the audience cringe. To this end, our work is about conversations that lead to understanding and expressed through kindness. The measurable result will be forming new relationships and strengthening existing ones between our members, who connect as friends.

Some may suggest that a meaningful relationship depends on active listening, as defined by listening without thought. If that is the definition, then I am incapable of active listening. When I ask others about themselves, I embark on a journey of discovery, a scavenger hunt, a mystery. This is an opportunity to learn about a specific world view, open a vault of experiences, and share in the personal and emotional growth. As my sons will attest, these conversations often exceed the limits of their patiently waiting. This only means that relationships are being built, as defined by a desire to return to the journey, the scavenger hunt, the mystery. As we work to live into our vision, I invite you to be part of the din that fills the sanctuary, the Johnson room, the hallways, by getting to know your community.

Inclusion

Inclusion is a right, not a privilege for a select few. - Judge Geary, *Alberto v Board of Education* (D N J 1992)

We are less when we don't include everyone - Stuart Milk

If the cause of poverty is marginalization, the cure is inclusion - Richard John Neuhaus

There is only one way to look at things until SOMEONE shows us how to look at them with Different Eyes - Pablo Picasso

If you don't change direction, you may end up where you are heading. - Lao Tzu

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory [challenges] which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. - Article 1: Purpose, United Nations (UN) Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities

Disabilities can be noticeable or "invisible" to others. Barriers that hinder participation can be physical, communication, or attitudinal. - Inclusion Handbook: Everybody Belongs, Everybody Serves

An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity - Martin Luther King

It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength - Maya Angelou

A lot of different flowers make a bouquet - Muslim origin

Strength lies in differences, not in similarities - Stephen R Covey

"Nothing About Us Without Us." A defining slogan of the disability justice movement.

Session Plan
Theme: Inclusion
February 2019

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

Inclusion is a right, not a privilege for a select few. - Judge Geary,
Alberto v Board of Education (D N J 1992)

Brief Check-in

Focus Reading:

Generally, society is set up to include those who fall into the “typical” range. Those of us who, for whatever reason, fall outside of that range, often find it up to us or our families to create ways to be included. - UUA Access and Inclusion Ministry

Focus Questions:

- When in your life have you been included or excluded in ways that mattered to you?
- What is the emotional experience of being included; how does it feel to be excluded?
- How does UUCP’s vision to be radically inclusive relate to your personal values?
- What would you change about your life or your community to become more inclusive?

Checkout/Likes and Wishes

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

Strength lies in differences, not in similarities - Stephen R Covey