

LREDA FALL CONFERENCE—SEXUALITY TEAM

The following notes provide a sense of the content that went along with the slide deck. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Melanie Davis, UUA OWL Program Coordinator, at mjdavis@uua.org

When participants entered the room in the morning, they receive a slip of paper with the definition of a word relating to sexuality

- **Sexual orientation** - a person's emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to others based on the gender of that person. It is determined by sexual drives, desires, fantasies, and more.
- **Pansexual** - attracted to people regardless of biological sex, gender, or gender identity.
- **Polyamory** - having one or more simultaneous, consensually non-monogamous relationships
- **Queer** - a self-identity label for people who feel they do not fit cultural norms for sexual orientation and/or gender identity. May also be used to challenge the status quo.
- **Fantasy** - thoughts, dreams, and stories with a sexual theme; a safe way to explore feelings and interests
- **Flirting** - a wonderful way to let someone know you're attracted to them, as long as the intent is not to manipulate.
- **Sexual Response Cycle** - the sequence of physical attraction or desire, pleasure, and sometimes the release of sexual tension.
- **Aural and Visual stimuli:** Things we hear (aural) or see that are arousing to us.
- **Asexual** - someone who does not experience spontaneous sexual desire or attraction
- **Sapiosexual** -- Someone attracted to another person's intelligence
- **Consent** -- Ongoing, enthusiastic agreement to participate in both sexual and non-sexual behaviors.
- **Personal Boundaries** -- physical, emotional and mental limits that a person creates to identify reasonable, safe and permissible ways for other people to behave towards them
- **Body Image** --What a person thinks about their body, how they see their body, typically affected by cultural standards and norms about what is attractive.
- **Transgender** -- A general term for a gender identity that transgresses dominant conceptions of gender. The gender someone was assigned at birth may differ from the biological sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Gender Fluid** -- Describes a person whose gender changes over time.

- **Gender Non-Conforming** -- Describes a person whose gender is something other than boy/man or girl/woman.
- **Gender Expression** --The cues a person shares about their gender, for example, the clothes they wear, their appearance, and how they talk.
- **Gender Identity** -- A person's inner understanding of their own gender.
- **Reciprocity** - the act of giving back to a person who gives to us.
- **Skin Hunger** - the human need to be touched, stroked, and held. The type of physical contact preferred is highly individual.
- **Sexual Identity** - how we perceive ourselves as sexual beings, including biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, gender roles, and sexual orientation.
- **Celibacy** - voluntarily deciding not to participate in any sexual behaviors, alone or partnered.
- **Intimacy** - the experience of feeling emotionally close to another person.
- **Sensuality** - how we feel about the body and how it responds to stimulation through all of our senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.
- **Sexualization** - the use of sex or sexuality to influence, manipulate or control other people.
- **Androgyny** - the mixing of traditionally masculine and feminine gender expression, or the lack of gender identification.

Agenda:

SLIDE 1 -- Red

9:00 - 9:30 - **LREDA Announcements** delivered by Lily and/or Dana R.

SLIDE 2 -- Morning Worship

Closing Words - "All of Me" By Rev. T. Michael Rock and Lynn Young

Father/Mother/Divine Creator,
I stand before you...exactly as I am

Exactly as you created me
Uniquely, divinely made
Your original

My footprint, my fingerprint
My way of loving
My way of living

My breathing, speaking, singing, dancing

Your creation

Help me embrace myself
All of me
Every cell of my being
Every breath of my living
Every touch of my hand
Every sigh, delight, joy, pain, sorrow
All mine

My sacred, sexual, spiritual adventure

Here I am
All of me
In my perfect imperfections

Every last bit of me
Forgiven and whole
Ready and becoming

Here I am
Bold and shy
Laughing and weeping
Loving and being loved

Here I am
Every relationship, every misstep,
Every piece of personal history
Here I am
Filled with your grace
Here I am

All my passion, all my desire, all my soul
Here I am
Open, eager, and ready
Here I am
All of Me
Touch me
Heal me
Here I am

SLIDE 7 – Agenda

SLIDE 8 – Your Planning Team

Melanie Davis, Susan Lawrence, Kathe Larick, Jessica Laike

- Sexuality Day Learning Objectives
 - demonstrate comfort communicating about sexuality in ways that are transferrable from the personal to the professional realms;
 - list the ways that greater knowledge and acceptance of their own sexuality can empower them personally and professionally;
 - identify at least three ways that sexuality and/or our UU values about sexuality are spiritual;
 - understand the intersections of their race, culture, spirituality, gender, etc. and their perspectives on sexuality;

- Today we will be talking about sensitive issues, and we encourage you to engage in self-care, taking bio and stretch breaks as needed, seeking out a quiet spot or chaplain, etc.
- Debrief table terms -
 - Did anyone have a hard time finding their table based on the definition they had?
 - Does anyone have any questions about the terms they see around the room? Does anything need to be defined for the entire group?

SLIDE 9 – Sexuality and Spirituality

Activity: Sexuality and Spirituality, Part 1

- Using one of the index cards on your table, write” Side A” on one side, along with your answer to the question, “How do I bring my sexuality into my congregation?” Our sexuality does not exist separate from whoever else we are: You may want to consider race, culture, spirituality, gender, among other aspects of your being. You might think of this question as an invitation to imagine the “you” others see in your congregational setting. Please keep your card in a safe place for use after lunch.
- We began with this activity because we believe we need to examine our own sexual self, including our assumptions and beliefs, to strengthen our ability to foster honest and effective conversations about sexuality in our congregations.
- In our roles, we have opportunities to promote positive self-image and healthy, well-informed relationships; to nurture our UU prophetic vision and action for justice; and to affirm the worth and dignity of everyone who walks through our congregations’ doors. Self-awareness, we believe, is essential if we mean to not only reactively handle but to proactively facilitate potentially uncomfortable or conflicted conversations in the realm of sexuality.

SLIDE 10 Sexuality Timelines

- We often consider our sexual history as a series of events: when we were born and assigned a sex, when we reached puberty, when we had sex for the first time, when

we made a decision about becoming a parent. These are indeed part of our sexual development, yet our history is much richer than that.

- ✓ We're going to ask you to dive deeper into your awareness of your sexuality by inviting you to create your sexuality timeline. You'll have 10 minutes to use your journal or other paper you may have to draw images, write words, use symbols -- use whatever system you wish.
- ✓ Onscreen, we've posted some ideas to consider -- they reference not only behaviors and developmental stages but also identities and a few prompts
- ✓ Then you'll be discussing the process and the feelings it evoked with your neighbor. You do not need to show your timeline to anyone else.
- ✓ After that, we'll ask you and your neighbor to connect with the rest of your table to identify some common ah-ha moments or common learnings from the experience.
- ✓ We'll end by asking a few tables to share their take-aways with the entire room.

SLIDE 11 Language of Sexuality

- ✓ We're now going to explore some of the language and topics around sexuality that cause discomfort, in hopes of making conversations about sexuality more comfortable, more meaningful, and more affirming.
- ✓ UUA Faith Development Director and OWL Trainer Jessica York once said, "The language we use affects the way we think." When we examine the language we use, we may notice that we are unintentionally causing micro-aggressions or otherwise expressing attitudes and assumptions that may get in the way of our being the justice-seeking people we seek to be in our personal and professional lives.
- ✓ Please take 2-3 blank index cards from the table and write on each card a word or phrase or topic related to sexuality that makes you personally uncomfortable. Then write a sentence explaining why you feel uncomfortable. It may be helpful to look at the Circles of Sexuality Model for ideas. We're going to collect and redistribute the cards for anonymity, so please print legibly. When you're done completing your cards, please place them in the bag on your table.
- ✓ We'd like you to take turns drawing cards from the bag you receive, reading them aloud, and discussing them. Please have one person be table act as a recorder to discuss the questions on the screen.
 - What do you feel in your body when you hear this person's concern? What is your emotional response/reflection?
 - How might you help this person (and perhaps yourself) feel less anxious or uncomfortable?
 - Does your congregation have norms for language related to sexuality?
- ✓ Large group discussion: What were some highlights of your discussion? We end this activity with the words of Malawian poet and social activist Upile Chisala: "When I am afraid to speak is when I speak. That is when it is most important: the freedom in fear."

SLIDE 13 Hard Conversations Scenarios

Now that you've had a chance to access some feelings and ways of becoming more comfortable, you're going to put those skills into practice.

Each table has an envelope with two "hard conversations" scenarios. We'd like you to split your table into two groups that each take one scenario. In a few minutes, you'll be sharing your scenario and responses with the other group at your table, and then we'll do some large-group processing.

Scenarios:

- You have been approached by a polyamorous family who would like to see you use some children's stories which affirm polyamorous relationships during story time. You also have families who are uncomfortable with the idea of poly families and have threatened to leave the congregation if such stories were used.
 - What is difficult for you about this situation? What feelings or discomfort comes up? How you do handle the situation? What conversations are or actions are needed and with whom?
- You have a child/youth in your program in the midst of a gender transition and is continually being mis-gendered by other children/parents/teachers in your program.
 - What feelings does this bring up for you? How you do handle the situation? What conversations are or actions are needed and with whom?
- A parent comes to you with information that a new member of your congregation is on a sex-offender registry and they want to know what you are going to do to ensure the safety of their children (and everyone else's).
 - What does this bring up for you? How you do handle the situation? What conversations are or actions are needed and with whom?
- Your youth group has a history of having trouble with the "no sexualized behavior" part of your covenant. Within the group are youth who identify as straight, lesbian/gay, bi-sexual and pansexual. You are preparing for a youth overnight at the church and have a parent questioning you about how you are going to create safe sleeping spaces for the youth and ensure that no breaches of covenant occur.
 - What does this bring up for you? How you do handle the situation? What conversations are or actions are needed and with whom?
- You observe that one of your jr. high schoolers is engaging in consensual sexting (text only, no photos) with another jr. high student during OWL class.
 - What does this bring up for you? How do you handle the situation? How might your response(s) differ if the other child is part of your program or not?
- One of your nursery care workers informs you that one of the 3 year olds in the nursery room has a habit of touching themselves while in nursery care on Sunday mornings. The care worker is uncomfortable and doesn't know how to handle it.
 - What does this bring up for you? What is your advice for the nursery care worker? What other conversations and/or actions might you take/have, if any?
- (Bring the large group back together)

- Which groups would like to share their scenario and one or two highlights from your discussion?

SLIDE 14 – Brave conversations / Lunch

SLIDE 15 Barriers in Congregations

Welcome back! You may notice the addition of some barrier methods of safer sex protection on your tables. You're welcome to open them if you're curious; be aware that the internal condoms are quite lubricated.

- It's time to talk about barriers. As you may imagine, the word barriers has many meanings related to both sexuality and congregations. First, we'll talk about safer sex barriers.
- The barriers on your table protect against sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, or both. Internal and external condoms protect against both pregnancy and STIs, while dams afford protection only against STIs during oral sex, oral-anal sex, and genital rubbing.
 - How many of you are from congregations that make condoms available?
 - How many of your congregations provide any barriers other than external condoms?
 - We've provided an assortment of barriers that can be used on different types of bodies for different types of sexual activities. We know that cost is a factor for all of our congregations, yet we want to model a best practice of supporting healthy, consensual sexual activity and recognizing a range of sexual behaviors and protection needs.

SLIDE 16 Discussion Questions

We'd now like to invite you to take five minutes to discuss your feelings about making safer sex barriers available in your religious setting. Please refer to the question prompts on-screen.

- What's your gut reaction to your congregation making free barriers available? How might you feel seeing a congregant access the bowl at age 14? 70? 35?
- How might a project to provide barriers relate to your role as a Religious Educator?
- How might barrier distribution relate to your congregation's mission, values, or culture?

SLIDE 17 – UCC Campaign

- As we come back together -- we anticipated that you might discover a need for messaging. The United Church of Christ has a clever campaign to promote sexual health through the use of condoms. (advance slide) UCC congregations can purchase a kit that contains two condoms, two samples of lubricant, an instruction card for the external condom, and a message in English and Spanish.
 - Sexuality is a gift from God to be shared with love and responsibility.
 - Loving carefully is a moral responsibility.
 - We affirm abstinence; it is always a viable choice.
 - When people choose to engage in sex, we affirm safer sexual behavior.

SLIDE 18 -- Barriers in Congregations

- Let's find out what barriers you've identified that could arise to discussing and providing the barriers in your congregation...
 - What issues could arise in discussion with your congregation's decision makers?
 - How can you personally challenge barriers to providing barriers? / What constrains you from doing so?
 - What do you need to learn or practice in order to be more comfortable addressing a sensitive issue like safer sex in your congregation?

SLIDE 19 Reflections on Relationships

When planning this day, we agreed that we wanted to include a chance for you to reflect on how you want to be connected to others in your personal and professional life. We're going to start by asking you to quickly create in your journal two grids, each with three columns across and four rows down. **Title one grid** Deal Makers and **the other** Deal Breakers. **Label the columns** Intimate Partner; Friends/Family; and Congregants. It will look something like this slide:

SLIDE 20 -- Grids

Once your grid is complete, start filling in the blanks for each column, considering the qualities you absolutely want in a healthy relationship -- the Deal Makers; and the qualities you absolutely will NOT accept in a healthy relationship -- the Deal Breakers.

SLIDE 21 – Discussion questions

When you and a neighbor are done completing the grid, please pair up to briefly discuss the questions that you'll see on the next slide to appear:

- How might knowing your personal Deal Makers and Deal Breakers help you establish or maintain healthy personal relationships?"
- Regarding your workplace, how could you help change the dynamic, if you were in an unhealthy relationship with a congregant?

SLIDE 22 – Consent Quote

- Consent is an essential component to healthy relationships, but it may not appear on your grids if you assume that trust, respect, communication ensure that consent is automatic. The tricky thing is that sometimes people's boundaries differ greatly, especially if we are from different cultures and traditions. We need to be crystal clear in our communication to partners, family and friends, and to the people we work with.
- Consent is often discussed only in terms of unwanted physical and sexual contact, but people can bump against or cross boundaries in other ways as well, including making us hear, see, and talk about things we want to avoid.
- It can be challenging to recognize another person's boundaries, especially if we don't know them well. It can be awkward to ask for consent and difficult to say no, because we have been taught not to hurt another person's feelings.

- Open communication and being able to hear and respect a partner's boundaries are key components of all kinds of healthy relationships. Hearing and accepting "no" from someone makes their "yes" all the more powerful and wonderful.
- Would anyone like to share how you might use this experience in your personal or professional life?

SLIDE 23 Activity: Sexuality and Spirituality, Part 2

- ✓ Find your index card from the start of the program -- the one on which you answered the question, "How do I bring my sexuality into my congregation?"
- ✓ On the blank side of the card, please write Side B, and answer the question again -- your answer may be different or similar or the same.
- ✓ Please take a few moments with the people sitting near you to share any notable differences in the A and B versions of your statements. We will put have some questions prompts onscreen.

SLIDE 24 – Discussion Questions

SLIDE 25 -- Creative Synthesis

- To conclude today's programming, we're going to create a LREDA 2016 Circles of Sexuality Model. You'll find large circles of paper around the room, one for every two tables to share. On the table you'll also find markers
- We invite you to take the next 10 minutes to communicate, in words, pictures, symbols, "What I learned about myself today," "What I made peace with today," and/or "What I'll take back with me." After the conclusion of the program, we'll post the circles for reflection during the rest of the conference.

SLIDE 26 Resources

SLIDE 27 Chalice

We are extinguishing the flame that we lit at the start of Sexuality Day, but our work continues. The exploration we do regarding our own sexuality can be at once challenging, enlightening, scary, traumatic, arousing, inward turning, outreaching, humorous, unwelcome, sad, joyful, and spiritual. It is also essential because it fosters sexual health and helps us to experience our sexuality in accordance with our values.

The Chinese poet Lu Yu wrote, during the Song Dynasty,
The clouds above us join and separate,
The breeze in the courtyard leaves and returns.
Life is like that, so why not relax? Who can stop us from celebrating?

We invite and encourage you to celebrate your sexuality. Thank you.