

It takes courage to be an ally, and privilege and compassion. It does not take an advanced degree or the right family, or even the correct politics or social theory. It does not take grand gestures or fancy words. You do not need to be an activist or an extrovert, but you can be if that is who you are. You can be an ally at any age. You do not need to find your perfection you can start any time to be an ally. Too often we let our fear, our guilt, or our pain create walls that we get to hide behind. It takes work to bring down those walls but we need to do it. But still it takes courage, privilege and compassion.

Oct 11, today, is National Coming out day and the anniversary of the 1987 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. As a Society we became a welcoming congregation in 1998 we have been open to LGBTQ folk for a very long time. This is a very good thing. but you know being a welcoming congregation is not a status that we receive and then we just forget about it. We have to remember to be aware of how we are welcoming and ways that we can do it better. We need to put into practice how it is that we can be that place where Lesbian Gay Transgender bisexual, queer, pan sexual, a-sexual all are welcome. We have to keep revisiting this to make sure that we are being the way that we want to be in this world.

And I think it also means that we need to go beyond being a place that LGBTQ folks can come to and find welcome. I think that we need to

take that next step and actively be allies to those folks who are more marginalized than our selves.

What does being an ally mean - well I don't think it means simply being friendly, although that is a good start. How many times have we heard something like "I am not homophobic some of my best friends are gay, or my cousin is gay, or my neighbor is gay. That is not being an ally that is being defensive.

I read an extended quote from Brene Brown this morning about courage because it does take courage to be an ally. Not the heroic kind of courage but the kind where you, I we speak from our hearts.

If the definition of heroics is putting your life on the line then it is heroic for a transgender or queer people to use a public bathroom, to go into a restaurant unaccompanied, to go through TSA screening at an airport, to forget to turn on the turn signal and risk a traffic stop. It is heroic for LGBTQ people to walk hand in hand with their sweetie. There is something wrong with this world where a display of affection can put your life in danger.

Because the truth is that the world we live in is still pretty hetero-normative if not homophobic.

I think our children are being raised differently, which is a blessing to this world. But we are all raised with messages that affirm heterosexuality as the norm. And so we need to start with a compassion that allows each of us to own our discomfort and imperfection and move from there. If we write our fear in the sand and let it the wind carry it off we have the opportunity for compassion.

Being an ally first and foremost means understanding that each of us who do not self identify as LGBTQ has a heterosexual privilege. We can go into bathrooms relatively unafraid. For centuries we have been able to marry, and leave our property to our spouse or partner. We can have children together easily and legally. We can go out on a date and not worry about being harassed.

It is human nature to struggle with privilege. Privilege is social power conferred on me by others. Sometimes that can feel awkward.

We UUs can sometimes be uncomfortable with our privilege

we are 78% white,

30% of UUs earn between 50,000 and 100,000

23% of UUs earn over 100,00 per year

32% have some college

22% have college degree

18% have post graduate

for a whopping 72% some college and above in our education.

It can be difficult to talk about our own privilege. Or at least let me say that I often see myself and others having difficulty. I grew up in a family where I was taught to not talk about age, religion, or money. And I still ended up being a UU.

It is a fairly common experience for folks who have grown up with privilege to be taught not to brag. And there is some caring in that - if I don't have a college degree it might be nice to not have to hear about someone else's three college degrees.

But it is important to recognize the difference between bragging or showing off and using what privilege we have in a way that helps a person or a group more marginalized than ourselves.

Recently I was spoke with a woman who is the mother of a transgender girl. Her daughter transitioned from assigned male to female during high school. I asked the mother how well the school had received her daughter when she first came back to school after her surgery. The mother said that

she was able to work with the school and that they had been very supportive. This mother was also an employee of the school and so she had more privilege than I might have had, in other eras we might have called it clout. Yes she used it to help her daughter but she also made the way just a little easier for the next student who comes out as transgender. If she was a different woman she might not have used her knowledge of the school system and educational law in NYS. She might have wanted to keep everything quiet. But then an opportunity for helping her daughter would have been missed.

When we don't admit to our privilege, our social power, then we lose the opportunity to use that privilege to stand with others to support others in their fight for justice. So we need to let go of our fear, our anxiety about owning that privilege.

And it takes compassion. We Unitarian Universalist are known for our curiosity, our intellectualism and a long standing commitment to the argument. But there is so much more to us than that.

Yesterday there was supposed to be an anti-Muslim group demonstrating outside of the Mosque on Comstock. Some of our members wanted to show the mosque something different. And so about 10 of us showed up with our Standing on the Side of Love banner and stood in front of the mosque. The

other group never appeared. But the president and vice- president of the mosque were there and they invited us in for some coffee and donuts - evidently some things cross the cultural divide. They showed us their building and then we had about an hour and a half of wonderful conversation where we could ask these two men about their faith and their life and they could ask us questions as well.

Someone in the group said something like fear in the hand looks like a weapon. I may not have that quote correct. But his point was that people like the ant-Muslim group who are threatening violence or who act in violence are driven by fear. And you know you cannot drive out fear with a solid intellectual argument. You drive out fear with compassion.

We UUs are primed for compassion. We are an eclectic group of people. You might be gay and I might be straight, you might be transgender and I might be cisgender, you might be pagan, I might be Christian.. But we don't come to this community to have our selfhood affirmed by sitting with folks who are just like us. We come here seeking community, connection, spiritual depth, intellectual challenge. And that means we invite diversity and when we do that we are also inviting discord unless we are intentional about creating and maintaining community. And we are intentional about that. In order for people in our congregation to get along we have to learn how to be accepting of one another. That is what we aspire

to and when we are at our best that is what we do.

We did that yesterday at the mosque. We showed up, we listened, we learned a little. The President and the Vice president of the Islamic Society sat with us. We found out a little bit about the lives of these two men. We heard about some of the difficulties that they face everyday. We didn't dismiss their experiences. We had a dialogue and it was a great thing.

When we engage from a place of compassion we create a space where there is no room for fear there is only room for humans. When we take down the walls that we hide behind we have a chance to build something else something more inviting more inclusive more welcoming. We have a chance to build something that allows for the humanity of all not simply those who fit the norm.

As Brene Brown put it our world could stand to be a little kinder a little braver.

In a world without end may this be so.