

**Rev it UP**  
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First Unitarian Congregation, Toronto  
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I am a cis gender, straight, older white woman. I have the ability and privilege of escaping notice - when I want to. I can go to the store, my grandson's soccer game or almost anywhere I please and most people, most of the time, don't even notice me. Sure, there are parts of my identity I don't always share. It is after all, awkward in secular Canada to tell people you are a minister. Oh, the things they assume about me – and how wrong they often are... but that isn't a big deal, after all at my age most people assume I'm retired, so work and vocation isn't usually a topic of conversation. All this to say, I have the ability to move through the world in a way that does not require me to pay attention to the reality of so many.

After the most recent election in the US, and the horrifying erosion of protections for LGBTQ2S+, I was proud of being Canadian. Queer American colleagues told me how lucky we are, and I was proud. Sure, I knew that there were some emboldened Canadians who saw the American political climate as a starting place for their agenda, but we've got fairly strong laws in Canada that took care of some of that nonsense. Right? Right, and... Yes, we do have strong federal laws, but things are changing, and not towards greater inclusion, equity and safety.

Data and statistics have a way of being annoying. The items in the news along with other information reveal things I'd rather not know, things that have disrupted my view of the way I believed things were – you know, Canada the good and tolerant. Data and statistics are, I've come to learn, are frequently annoying. And along with new information, I've felt compelled to speak out, hold a position, and leave my sometimes, too comfortable, bubble.

The first memories I have of this particular bubble, the one I didn't even know I was in, the cis, straight woman bubble being burst, go back to my first year in university, in the mid-70's. I had a classmate that I shared a desk with, in a European History class. One day I arrived and spotted a newspaper – it looked like the student paper – on his desk. I'd not seen the most recent edition, so I reached over to look at it. His, "NO" came too late for me, to stop, and I turned it over, to reveal the name of the publication; "McMaster Homophile". "Oh No" he said, "Now you know". In truth it took me a beat to understand what I was looking at, and to be cool, I glanced at the front page, looked inside for a moment, and then put it back where I found it. I said something that reassured him, that I wasn't horrified or offended, and over time our relationship deepened. I cried, when later that year I learned he was leaving McMaster, because Hamilton didn't feel safe for him. He'd been beaten up after leaving a party

downtown... I had no idea that violence was a real and ever-present danger in the lives of so many.

The next notable bubble bursting was probably a decade or so later. We'd become UU and Gary had attended a few meetings of the new Welcoming Congregation committee. He'd come home and share what he was learning. One day, we were talking, watching our two daughters play – they were still quite young – maybe 5 and 7, and he said to me, "You know, statistically speaking, there is a chance, one of them could be a lesbian". It felt like my brain came skidding to a stop. And then I thought of all the ways that the world, our society and culture could make their lives more difficult came to mind. And, in that moment, the fierce LGBTQ equity fighter, was born. I remember thinking, 'if the world can't be accepting of my children's possible future self, I was going to have to do some things to change the world'. Sadly 'Fierce LGBTQ Equity Fighter' doesn't fit well on capes or t-shirts. In that moment, another bubble was burst.

It's been easy at times to hang out in bubbles, as I say a cis-straight-white woman can navigate the world in ways that are not possible for so many. But I've worked to stay aware... and today, I can't help but confront the sad reality that progress is not linear, that movements need care and tending. Sometimes the hardest thing about leaving a bubble is not that the world becomes more frightening. It is that we can no longer pretend we did not know. These moments, need, I think, people like me, to speak up, to challenge assumptions.

I had been aware of the changes in Alberta and New Brunswick that have made life more difficult for Transgender youth to claim their identify. And in 2023, I put on my infrequently worn clergy collar and joined a group that was counter protesting the 1 Million March 4 Children rally. I'm delighted to report that mine was only one of many clergy collars there that day on the 'counter protest' side – yes, the local police, perhaps wisely separated us. I met United, Anglican and Presbyterian colleagues, with signs that affirmed the rights and dignity of trans kids and inclusive education. It was a good day.

But those annoying and pesky statistics keep on reminding me that this is not the time for me to rest on my smug Canadian laurels. Yes, we have laws, but the work is not done... Rights can be written into law, and thankfully they are, but belonging and inclusion and safety must be renewed in every generation. The work of justice is not only about protecting freedoms already won but in tending the relationships and communities that make those freedoms real and lasting. And the reality is that the rights and freedoms legally granted are still, in many ways, being eroded.

Across the country, in some provinces, which have authority over educational policy, moves are being made to make life more difficult and dangerous, particularly for trans youth. Alberta has changed their laws, to include requirements that schools must notify parents if a student asks staff to use a new name or pronouns connected to gender

identity. The reality is, that for at least some of the students whose identity does not match their name, this will be risky – non-supportive parents can stand in the way of early steps for transition. We know many homeless youth are trans kids who have been asked to leave the family home. Schools must also get parent opt-in consent for instruction that deals with gender identity, sexual orientation, or human sexuality. The accompanying health act restricts gender-affirming care for youth.

Referencing Alberta's legal changes, Jen Gilbert, a professor at the University of Toronto has said, "It has to be the most hateful piece of legislation that we've seen in the LGBTQ community," said "They seem to want to take a very small number of young people and turn them into political pawns. And not only does it hurt those young people, it sends a signal to all queer and trans kids that their identities are up for debate." Gilbert has observed that the changes mirror the legislative activism of conservatives in the United States. In New Brunswick and Ontario there have been proposals that are like those enacted in Alberta but thankfully have not been fully enacted. But the language we are hearing is similar – clearly there are those who would use the language of parental rights to make things more difficult for queer and trans youth.

What I also know is that these legal changes and legislative proposals echo some of what is happening in Canadian society. This is not a time for Canadian smugness. Relative to other countries, Canada still is considered one of the most open and accepting countries. Some use the word tolerant... personally I think tolerant is a low bar. I remember someone saying years ago now, I can tolerate an outhouse, but I don't like it. Perhaps we are still a tolerant country, but things are sliding. A 2024 survey asked people in many countries whether they agree that LGBTQ+ people should be able to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. In Canada about 49% agreed that people should be able to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. The significant concern is that this represents a 12-percentage point decline from 2021. When asked, about support of LGBTQ2S+ people showing affection in public (such as holding hands/kissing) the response was 40% favourable, and that was 8 points decline. Regarding the portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters in movies and television, there was a 10% reduction from 2021, and only 33% were supportive. On average support for inclusion and acceptance of people's public identities had declined by 10% in 3 years.

Those shifts in attitudes, troubling as they are, aren't indicative of the most concerning reality. Alongside this downward shift in support came an alarming increase in hate crime. In Canada, the statistics are shocking. Hate crimes targeting LGBTQ people have risen. Police-reported hate crimes targeting sexual orientation increased sharply. In the 1 year between 2022 and 2023 there was an almost 70% increase in incidents. And incidents targeting gender identity and expression rose again in 2024, for the fourth consecutive year, representing a 184% increase, since 2020. And to be sure these

crimes are disproportionately assault-based. These hate crimes go beyond property-based incidents, troubling as they are. We're not talking about eggs thrown at front doors or graffiti – we are talking about assault. I'm guessing that none of this surprises some of you. This temperature-taking of the current situation for so many is another bubble bursting moment for me.

The statistics are not only annoying, but they are also alarming. The threat of violence looms larger than it has... In fact a CSIS- the Canadian Security Intelligence agency – spokesperson has stated, " the violent threat posed by the anti-gender movement is almost certain to continue and that violent actors may be inspired by the 2023 University of Waterloo attack to carry out their own extreme violence against the 2SLGBTQI+ community or against other targets they view as representing the gender ideology 'agenda'."

Statistics Canada reports that 56% of 2SLGBTQ+ youth (ages 15–24) met criteria for a mental health or substance-use disorder in the previous year, compared with 29% of cisgender heterosexual youth. And that about 27% of 2SLGBTQ+ youth Major reported having a major depressive episode compared with 11% of their straight peers.

I could go on...

So, what are we, those of us here today in person and on-line, supposed to do? What do we do in the face of what seems to me, to be very a very frightening return to earlier, less affirming understandings?

It has been helpful for me to remember that justice and inclusion have not, and probably will never be, a 'once and done' proposition. I think there is a deep evolutionary need, rooted in earlier times, for humans to be able to identify who is, and who is not, "one of their people". For us, as Unitarian Universalists, the answer, if not the practice, is 'everyone'... we have after all, made it our business to remind ourselves of the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We don't do this perfectly, but it is our aspiration. And that aspiration asks some things of us, it asks us to remember that the danger is not always the sudden removal of rights but that sometimes it is the slow normalization of exclusion—when fewer people object, when language changes, when protections become negotiable. Those of us who have the protection of a bubble need to pay attention and remember that the opposite of inclusion is not always hatred. Sometimes it is forgetting. Sometimes it is assuming the work is done. Sometimes it is mistaking yesterday's courage for today's commitment.

There are many examples of people having the courage to do today's work.

Students and youth organizing is happening, youth speaking at school board meetings and creating, where they didn't exist, LGBTQ+ clubs and support groups. There have been student-led walkouts and rallies. Teachers and educators have, in significant

numbers continue to support LGBTQ+ students, even when policies are debated. Organizations and advocates have used Canadian legal protections to challenge policies they see as discriminatory. Many ordinary people are doing what they can to assert their support for the LGBTQ+ community. The other night, my watch reminded me I should go for a walk... I took the short block, maybe 35 houses, and 4 of them, in addition to mine, had visible displays, celebrating pride. That feels significant to me... not something I think I would have seen a few years ago. It wasn't so long ago now that the Unitarian Universalists were the only faith group at pride related events and public witness actions... now we are joined by others. Things have changed for the good, and the work isn't done.

I don't know what Reving up pride will look like for you. But I do know that the work of being kind, of asserting rights, of explicitly countering ignorance, fear and hatred, continues. Some of us have the luxury of bubbles. Others don't, and those of us who can avoid the work, because we feel safe, or it doesn't affect us, need to find ways to keep at it, not because we don't have the heart for it, but because we are tired of it, and we sorry that the progress that has been made feels so tenuous. The temptation, when the world becomes frightening, is to wish the burden had never arrived. To wish we lived in an easier time. But every generation is handed its own version of the ring. The question is not whether we asked for it. The question is whether we will carry it together. Remember Frodo, wishing the ring had never come to him and Gandalf's response, "we cannot choose the times we live in, but we can choose how to respond to the time we are given. May we be like Frodo, we may not know the way, the path may not be clear. And perhaps that is enough for today. The way is not revealed all at once. We make the way — by each act of courage, each conversation, each moment when we choose belonging over silence. But lets, each of us, individually and collectively, take the ring.

Let us take a few deep breaths in silent reflection