

**Representation Matters: Come Out!**  
**Rev. DC Fortune**  
**UU Congregation of the Susquehanna Valley**  
**October 9, 2022**

Part 1:

After the excitement and debauchery of the Roaring 20s crashed down, the motion picture industry, in an effort to avoid censorship from the government, came up with a self-imposed morality code, which, according to film curator Chelsea O'Brien:

prohibited profanity, suggestive nudity, graphic or realistic violence, sexual persuasions and rape. It had rules around the use of crime, costume, dance, religion, national sentiment and morality. And according to the code – even within the limits of pure love or realistic love – certain facts have been regarded as outside the limits of safe presentation. So basically, this means we have a whole lot of married couples sleeping in separate beds for at least 20 years.”

Former Postmaster General Will Hayes came up with the code, saying, “The code sets up high standards of performance for motion-picture producers,” ... “It states the considerations which good taste and community value make necessary in this universal form of entertainment.”

Ridicule of authority: religious, law enforcement, patriarchal family structures, was forbidden. Audiences were not to be led to side with the criminal, or wrong-doer in a film’s storyline.

There was a rule that forbade the portrayal of gay characters in any sort of supportive light, and it became commonplace for gacy characters to die or find some sort of conversion to heterosexuality before the final credits rolled.

Psychologists have long held that feelings of isolation and shame can lead to significant depression and even suicidal ideology, as reflected in the statistics cited by Linda and Wanda in last week’s service.

I remember a time when I lived in Maine that I had the chance to meet one of our congressional delegation at a county democratic party spaghetti supper. You know the kind of thing. I knew this congresscritter from my years in political activism in Maine. I knew he was gay, I knew he was

closeted, at least officially (truly his identity was among the worst-kept secrets in political circles.) He had been in state government, as first a representative, then a senator, and eventually rose to leadership.

This was in 2010, in the fall, specifically. The news was filled with reports of gay youth and young adults being bullied and tormented online to the point where we were losing one or two to suicide every week.

When this person stuck out his hand to shake mine, for the first time in my life, I refused. "No, Mike, not this time," I said.

There was a man sitting next to me at the table who was a member of the church where I was also a member. Shocked, he said, by way of apology to the politician, "DC's a very angry person."

Trembling with fury, I left the dinner. We were losing queer kids at a horrific rate, due to lack of leadership, lack of role models, lack of hope for a future, and this person remained safely in the closet, protected by his staff and handlers from having to handle difficult questions from the press, and happily going about his safe, comfortable life, while kids died.

That politician has since come out publicly, so I am not breaking any confidence in telling this story.

Representation matters, friends. It matters a lot. It can save lives.

Video: "How Children Reacted to the new 'Little Mermaid'"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPiWK9zS3hg>

## Part 2:

Whoopi Goldberg has told the story before of the first time she saw Nichelle Nichols in the role of Lieutenant Uhuru on Star Trek. She ran through her house shouting, "Mamma, Mamma, there's a black lady on tv and she ain't no maid!"

That kind of representation let Whoopi know there was room for her in acting. When Gene Roddenberry began creating Star Trek: Next Generation, Whoopi approached him with cash, asking to be one of the producers, because of the impact the original show had on her life.

Last week, Linda and Wanda talked about the power of books to make them feel not alone. I remember those early years of coming out, myself. A friend loaned me her dog-eared copy of *Rubyfruit Jungle* by Rita Mae Brown to read, and it was the first time I had seen a gay character as a protagonist in a story.

I set about reading what I could find, although I was nervous about taking books out of the library. The student workers in the library sat with me in class, and I was too afraid. I would sometime travel to Boston with my first girlfriend to find bookstores where we would load up.

This was in 1986, in Farmington, Maine. At that time in that county (Franklin County) there were more registered handguns than registered Democrats.

I began to learn the secret gay code that we all used to identify each other. “Oh, I went to the Holly Near concert” was always a sure fire way to identify another lesbian. I learned about the significance of a lambda, which was often used as a symbol in queer women’s literature. I acquired a series of buttons and pins with coded symbols on them. I learned to be alert for various author’s names in conversations. I met Joan Nestle and Urvashi Vaid at conferences, and Dorothy Allison, and John Preston, and Alison Bechdel. I saw Cheryl Wheeler in concert, and Leah Delaria. I went to Provincetown, Massachusetts, where I looked around and found myself among the majority of people on the streets, in the shops, and at restaurants. It was overwhelming to see that many people whom I knew to be like me. I was not alone. I did not understand a lot of the cultural stuff, but I knew I was not alone, and that was life-giving.

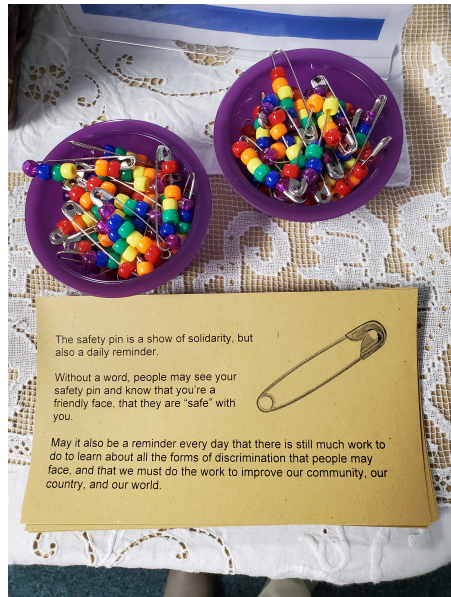
Earlier, I told you about the rocks and safety pins set up on the tables around the room. I am going to invite you now to spend some time working together with the children and youth, painting rocks, or making safety pins. These simple, three-dimensional baubles are signs that queer folk may see pinned to your lapel, or on your desk or bookshelf, that let them know that they are not alone, and that you are a safe person to talk to if they need support.

I invite you to participate now with that thought in your mind – think of the person who will come to pride and see a rock painted with the stripes of their identity, or the one who will see that rock on a teacher’s desk, of the pin of the jacket of a stranger, and know that they are not alone.

Jennifer is going to play a piece from Samuel Barber to accompany us during this exercise. I'll wrap up when she's done playing.

Please begin.

[Activity: creating rainbow safety pins to wear, and painting Pride rocks to give out at various Pride festivals. Here are the outcomes of the morning's activities!]



Accompanying Music: Violin Concerto Op. 14, Allegro by Samuel Barber, played by Jennifer Sacher Wiley

### Part 3:

Thank you for engaging with this exercise. We've had the rock-painting table set up at the back of the room ever since I got here, I think, and I like the idea of having a perpetual art station in worship. Some of us listen better when our hands are busy doing artsy things, like knitting, or crocheting, or even painting rocks.

If you are a member of this congregation, you got an email this week from me, explaining that I am transgender. Since I was ordained seven years ago, I have been one of the "trans ministers," first identifying as non-binary, and then later as a trans-man. This was the first time I came into a new community simply as me, a minister. A queer minister, sure, but these days that's not such a big deal. Having spent so many years as the publicly

transgender minister, it surprised me when Wanda mentioned that not everybody in the congregation knew. The search team knew, because they saw my resumes and transcript with my birth name, and the board knew because they saw the contract we signed, but other than that, nobody really made a big deal about it.

And so I came out. Because role models and visibility matter. Kids need to be able to look at adults who are living life and doing all the grown up sort of life things that we do, and know that there's room for them to grow up and be adults.

Life is not easy for anyone. We all struggle with daily stuff like work and bills and family things and health issues and the like. But nobody should have to feel alone and ashamed of who they are. We are the church that welcomes LGBTQ folks. We are the place where queer people can be affirmed and held and loved just as they are. We are the place where people of all kinds of stripes can find the room to expand into their emergent selves, knowing that transformation is part of life, and that they are supported.

May this be our practice and our prayer.

Amen.