



June 6, 2021

Addiction & Recovery Taskforce: LGBTQIA+ Communities and Addiction

- Rev. Josh Blakesley, Love In Action UCC

I am grateful to be the Executive Director of **The Welcome Project PA**, a nonprofit that hosts **SAGA Community Center**, which is an LGBTQIA+ hub of resources, a queer library, various support and community groups, and much more. I am lucky to be able to work with many LGBTQIA+ communities and individuals as a result. I am continually impressed by the resiliency and courage of so many of our staff, volunteers, and participants. It is incredible what many of them have overcome and how they are spreading love, acceptance, and learning wherever they go. I am also aware as part of this work [and in my work as a UCC minister], that there are many who identify as LGBTQIA+ who are dealing with addictions. According to recent studies, an estimated 20 to 30 percent of LGBTQIA+ folk abuse substances; this is compared to about 9% the population.

Why is that? Factor in homophobia/ transphobia, family problems, violence, and social isolation. Imagine if on a regular basis one is experiencing things like discrimination or stigmatization based on gender identification or expression and/or based on who one loves; hate crimes, emotional abuse, threats, public humiliation or ridicule, rejection or shame from family or friends, loss of employment, and/or internalized homophobia or self-hatred. Sadly, these realities are true for many.

And this is why it so important to de-stigmatize addiction and to fully embrace the process of recovery, albeit a process that is specific and relevant to LGBTQIA+ people.

Our congregations and other ministry settings can be of help. All UCC congregations and settings that have publicly stated that they are Open & Affirming (and also those who have not yet done so) can be light-houses and safe havens for people who deserve a path forward and appropriate care. What can you do? We can all form relationships with organizations and facilities that welcome LGBTQIA+ folk openly, as well as allies; we can lift up and support treatment programs that include LGBTQIA+ staff; we can spread the word about recovery programs that include specialized treatment. We can host LGBTQIA+ support groups and GSAs; we can have pamphlets and brochures about recovery services and LGBTQIA+ resources in our buildings and all of our online platforms.

Most importantly, we can reach out in love and compassion to anyone in the LGBTQIA+ communities who have been marginalized or left to feel like they have no safe and brave space in our congregations. This is the first and essential step that we must do publicly.

For further info, please visit SAGA Comm. Center's resource page <https://www.sagahatboro.com/resource-map>. And by the way, feel free to use this resource page as a starting point to create your own



UCC Musicians Association Conference Set for July 8-10

Did you know the UCC Musicians Association is hosting an online conference this summer, just prior to General Synod? On July 8-10, musicians, pastors and lay leaders are invited to attend a very special conference, filled with workshops, worship, networking and a concert. Take advantage of the online format and lack of travel expenses! All conference content will be accessible for one month after the event. For info about the UCCMA, including registration for the conference go to: <https://uccma.wildapricot.org/>.

