

ASKING THE CLERGY

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LGBT inclusiveness in your faith

BY JIM MERRITT

Special to Newsday

In December, Pope Francis took a small but significant step toward making the Roman Catholic church more welcoming to LGBT people when he formally approved letting Catholic priests bless same sex couples. This week's clergy discuss traditional and evolving LGBT inclusiveness in rituals and other aspects of religious community life.

THE REV. KATE SALISBURY

Canon for Christian Education, Cathedral of the Incarnation, Garden City

The church benefits immeasurably from the contributions of LGBTQ+ clergy and lay people. These Christians are essential to our common life and the work of sharing the Gospel. Without them the Body of Christ would be incomplete. At baptism, Christians vow to respect the dignity of every human being. This pledge reflects our understanding that the breadth and depth of human identity affords an ever-widening appreciation of the nature of God. St. Paul described the church as a body whose members are diverse by design. Together, we continue Jesus' ministry through cooperation, trust and mutual affection. The canons of the Episcopal Church state that sexual orientation, gender identity and expression must be protected from discrimination in both spiritual and secular contexts. We have codified these key beliefs by broadly



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Put quite simply, the Reform denomination of the Jewish faith has supported and continues to support LGBTQ+ people by treating all people equally regardless of sexuality or gender identity. Hebrew words, like many languages, have genders in terms of verb conjugation, etc., therefore it is difficult when a ritual is attached to a gender. The Reform movement of Judaism has created new Hebrew words or tweaked existing Hebrew terms to celebrate the wide range of genders in existence. Instead of Bar or Bat Mitzvah (son or daughter of the commandments), different Reform synagogues and congregations use terms such as BaMitzvah or B'Mitzvah (subject to mitzvah), Kabbalat Mitzvah (receiving the mitzvah) and Brit Mitzvah (covenant of mitzvah). In addition, love is love, and being LGBTQ+ is no obstacle to marriage. Again, in the spirit of acceptance and love, many Reform Jews have chosen to adapt a line in the traditional wedding ceremony to add the words "ever evolving" law of Moses and Israel in order to keep traditional words and also keep the tradition of growth. Speaking personally, my congregation fully embraces all people as who they are, and who they might yet be.

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authorizing the celebration of same sex marriages, prohibiting gender-based discrimination in the ordination of clergy and opposing secular legislation that restricts access to public services for transgender and gender non-conforming people. The Episcopal Church supports LGBTQ+ people as leaders, teachers and companions in a tradition of faith through which we seek to live meaningful and holy lives.

THE REV. DAVID CARL OLSON

Associate Minister for Congregational Life, Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock

In a way, Unitarian Universalism supports LGBT people by "taking care of our own." All kinds of people — lesbian, bisexual, gay, straight — find a home in our congregations. People across the gender spectrum are our people. Together we are learning a new way. Unitarian Universalists have sup-

ported LGBT folk since the 1970s, when we created formal structures to welcome and minister to lesbian and gay members and friends. We authorized marriage services, ordained gay and lesbian ministers, cared for families during the AIDS crisis and created religious education curriculums that shared what we were learning about queer life. Today, we continue these efforts of education, support and ritual inclusion. And we acknowledge that we have much yet to learn. At the Congregation at Shelter Rock, we recently invited a panel of transgender New Yorkers to help us more fully understand their lives and their community. Our hope was not to study LGBT folk as an "other" to be examined objectively, but to be in relationships that acknowledge LGBT folk as people of inherent worth and dignity. On their terms, we hope to build the human family of ethical, spiritual and communal relationship.