



Why Pronouns Matter

by Intern Minister Mira Mickiewicz (she/her/they/them)

At church and elsewhere, it's becoming more common for people to introduce themselves with the pronouns they use, and to ask, "What pronouns do you use?" Though this may be an unfamiliar question for you, becoming comfortable with it is a way to live our UU principles. Here's why:

Gender is a primary way our creative identities interact with the world. Many people feel comfortable with the gender assigned to them at birth based on their genitals -- assigned male or female -- and are called **cisgender**. (Cis means "on the same side of", so for these people, gender and sex-at-birth align). For many others, their assigned gender is not a true or comfortable identity. They may identify as **transgender or trans** ("on the other side of" gender: gender identity/expression does not conform with the sex assigned at birth), or as another gender, including **nonbinary/genderqueer** (not identifying with male or female gender exclusively), **genderfluid** (with an ever-changing gender identity), or **agender** (not experiencing gender as an essential aspect of identity).

Pronouns are the words we use to describe people in the 3rd person. Typically, cisgender and transgender women and girls use **she/her/hers**, and cisgender and transgender men and boys use **he/him/his**. Many nonbinary, genderfluid, and agender people choose to use alternative pronouns or a combination of pronouns to express this identity, including **they/them/theirs, ze/zir/zirs**, or just using the **person's name**.

At First Unitarian, we want people of all gender identities to feel welcome in our beloved community. Making a standard practice of including pronouns in our introductions and on name tags allows space for everyone to self-identify. Otherwise, incorrect, appearance-based assumptions can cause significant pain for people of gender minorities.

If you get someone's pronouns wrong, or forget them, apologize, fix the mistake, *and move on*. Just like someone's name, gender is an important part of our identities, but it's not the only part -- over-focusing on a mistake can just amplify the harm by making someone feel like they don't belong.

So, what pronouns do you use? Let's get used to including our pronouns on our name tags, letting people know what we use, and asking this of one another, in service of seeing more of the heart of each of our divine selves!

Thank you to those who helped contribute to and improve this piece: Rev. D.L. Helfer, Tobias Gurl, Laura Gorrin, and Kerry Heintze.