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A CHRISTIAN CONVERSATION GUIDE

CREATING SAFE AND
INCLUSIVE SPACES
FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE
LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL
& TRANSGENDER

WE ARE ALL GOD'S CHILDREN

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was created by the Religion & Faith Program & Project One America at the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) to support Christians in building safe and inclusive faith communities for all God's children including people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT).

When asked, Jesus told us that the greatest commandment was to love, and that we should love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). This is an important lesson when thinking about the role of our faith communities in ending the violence, fear and discrimination that many people who are LGBT experience.

Every week, the church pews are filled with our family and friends, co-workers and neighbors, and countless others throughout our communities. By promoting inclusive messages and practices inside and outside of the church, our congregations can have a positive and supportive impact on the everyday lives of people who are LGBT. Just like the welcome Christ demonstrated to all in society (Galatians 3:28), these actions — when rooted in the same love and compassion — can be transformative and even life-saving.

This guide provides practical suggestions for facilitating conversations and other actions to build safe and inclusive faith communities. As a general recommendation, you'll want to adapt these materials to meet the needs of your own community. Remember, we're all on a journey and we're constantly deepening our understanding on ways to be more inclusive of people who are LGBT. Members of your community whom you may assume aren't inclusive may surprise you. Conversely, those who have been inclusive may actually be unwelcoming to people who are LGBT in their congregations. We recognize these conversations can be hard and that people are in different places. However, we believe people of faith and goodwill can have honest conversations about these issues and agree that no one deserves to be harmed or treated unfairly for any reason. What's most important is ongoing dialogue.

If you need any information or support at any point in the journey, feel free to contact the Religion & Faith Program staff at the Human Rights Campaign Foundation via email (religion@hrc.org) or by phone (202.216.1524).

We hope this work will prove an effective tool as you reach out to your community, and work to create a safer and more inclusive world for **all God's children**.

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6 WAYS TO GET STARTED



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Each church community is at its own place in the journey toward becoming fully welcoming and inclusive of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). Some congregations may be well on their way. Others will be just venturing out. The following is a list of six possible steps on that journey. Consider each with an eye for what best meets the strengths and needs of your own community.

SIX STEPS ON THE JOURNEY TO INCLUSION

- 1. Host a small group conversation:** Small group conversations are a starting point for your congregation or faith community to talk about the needs of people who are LGBT. These conversations allow your congregation to build a compassionate response, even if there is theological disagreement. Read the enclosed section "Hosting a Small Group Conversation" to get started.
- 2. Preach or teach a sermon or Sunday school class on Love, Inclusion and Compassion:** Depending on your role in your congregation, consider writing a sermon or creating Sunday school or Bible study curriculum around the themes of Love, Inclusion and Compassion. Talk about the compassionate ministry of Jesus Christ and His message of unconditional love for all God's children (Matthew 7:12). Read the enclosed section, "Themes for Sermons and Religious Education" to get started.
- 3. Pledge to become an inclusive congregation:** Sign our pledge today and commit to becoming an inclusive congregation. If you're a lay leader or clergy person, we invite you to complete the enclosed "Clergy Commitment Form."
- 4. Signup for the HRC Foundation's Religion & Faith newsletter:** We invite you to receive email updates that provide easy access to information, resources and community events on faith and LGBT-inclusion issues. Visit www.hrc.org/religion and sign up to receive the newsletter. We offer state-specific newsletters in some states.
- 5. Contact the HRC Religion & Faith Program:** If you need further support or suggestions on how to begin a discernment process toward becoming an inclusive congregation, contact the Religion & Faith Program at HRC. Our staff is available to answer any questions and provide or recommend support and resources. For many denominations, there are existing resources and LGBT-inclusive groups that our staff can bring to your attention.
- 6. Become a lead volunteer:** Lead volunteers in a number of states are trained by HRC Foundation Religion & Faith Program staff to recruit and retain volunteers from within the faith community; organize and host community dialogues and gatherings; and identify folks who are interested in sharing their story. Contact the Religion & Faith Program at HRC to become a lead volunteer in your city.

PEOPLE OF FAITH WHO ARE LGBT



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It is often assumed that people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) have no interest in religion or in joining a faith community. Stereotyping perpetuates this misconception. In fact, many people who are LGBT enjoy a deep and abiding faith. Their longing for a loving and welcoming spiritual home is shared by all people of faith – and is often what draws us into communion.

PEOPLE OF FAITH WHO ARE LGBT

In many parts of our country, it's still difficult to live openly as a person who is LGBT. In a 2014 survey¹ conducted by the Human Rights Campaign, a majority of people who are LGBT across several states, cited "preventing harassment and violence" as their top concern. They spoke about discrimination in the workplace; unfriendly healthcare providers; bullying at schools; intolerant teachers or administrators; and experiences of violence, harassment or rejection in public, at home and at their houses of worship. As a result, many people of faith who are LGBT are unable to act on the impulse to worship and serve alongside others of a like mind.

Because our larger communities are closely linked to our congregations, people of faith play a critical role in ending violence and discrimination against LGBT individuals. The consequences of closing our doors can be devastating:



My parents yelled at me daily and said mean and hateful things, sometimes waking me up in the middle of the night. My high school teachers and administrators knew but couldn't do anything about it. I called a local shelter to see if I could stay there but when I told them I feared for my safety because I'm gay, they said they couldn't help me — because they were a Christian shelter and didn't support my "lifestyle."

1 "2014 Human Rights Campaign Survey of LGBT People"

While there are many stories of people who are LGBT experiencing rejection from a faith community, there are also stories about congregations that opened their doors to their LGBT neighbors:

“As a child I knew nothing of being transgender. When I turned to my Southern Baptist theology for help, it told me that I had to pray for God to take this ‘sin’ from me. I begged God to make me ‘normal,’ but to no avail. So I walked away. Trying Unitarianism was my first step back into a church community. Then I was invited to do a program at a United Church of Christ. As soon as I arrived, people began to welcome me. I had thought I would never be welcome in God’s house again, much less share in communion. That was seven years ago. Now I’m active in my local UCC church and I educate people and faith groups on trans issues.”²



2 Story Shared by www.BelieveOutLoud.com

Creating safe and inclusive congregations for people who are LGBT embodies Jesus' message that we are all one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Such communities create transformational and, in many cases, life-saving experiences. As you work to better understand the needs of people who are LGBT, the best course of action is often to simply listen with an open mind and heart. An authentic desire to support the needs of people who are LGBT will help you discern the path ahead, and build a ministry rooted in unconditional love.

It will take strong leadership to make your community a safer and more inclusive place for people who are LGBT. That doesn't just mean leadership from the pulpit. It means individuals starting private conversations, and it often depends more on raising thoughtful questions than on making statements or demands.

Included in this toolkit are activities you can use to initiate conversations in your faith community. We recommend contacting the HRC Foundation's Religion & Faith Program via email (religion@hrc.org) or phone (202.216.1524) if you need any help or support getting started.

HOSTING A SMALL GROUP CONVERSATION



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People of faith who wish to initiate conversations toward greater inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people will benefit by first acknowledging love, compassion and care as their guiding values. It is important for people inside and outside our congregations to see that our faith calls us to create safe and inclusive communities for all God's children. Many Christians who are new to this conversation and conflicted — that is, not sure how to reconcile being theologically affirming or supportive of people who are LGBT — are typically confronting several challenging realities.

Many well-meaning, compassionate people face very real challenges when discussing the inclusion of people who are LGBT. They include:

- ▶ Traditionally held beliefs that the Bible calls for the exclusion of people who are LGBT.
- ▶ Unclear or vague biblically-based language and reasoning to support the full inclusion of people who are LGBT inside and outside the church.
- ▶ Family, friends and other community members who may influence them to be supportive or unsupportive of full LGBT inclusion.
- ▶ Feelings that the prevailing attitudes within churches and the larger culture are in conflict.
- ▶ A belief that being “homosexual” or “transgender” is a choice rather than acknowledging LGBT identities as inherent.

When speaking with conflicted Christians, it's important that you (or the facilitator) feel comfortable meeting people where they are. Sometimes things will be said that are not intentionally hurtful but may impact or trigger people who are LGBT or allies in a negative way. Sometimes, conflicted Christians will want to address how you (or the facilitator) are able to reconcile your faith and LGBT-inclusive beliefs and practices. Often, the real issue is a lack of access to resources or to space for dialogue to talk this through in a productive and healthy way. Remember, we are all on a journey and we're constantly deepening our understanding of ways to be more inclusive of people who are LGBT.

Before convening a group for conversation or sharing your ideas with individuals, think about with whom you will be speaking, their specific

strengths and their challenges, and whether or not you are the best facilitator for a conversation with that group. It's especially helpful to model the very sense of inclusion that you're hoping to create. (For example, if the congregation refers to people who are LGBT as “gay” you can use transgender and lesbian examples.) Always return to the message of building safe and inclusive communities for people who are LGBT. Here are some helpful suggestions for starting the conversation.

TIPS FOR THE FACILITATOR

This section outlines some tips and practices for the facilitator in convening a small group conversation. These conversations are a starting point for your congregation or faith community to talk about the experiences of people who are LGBT in faith communities. These conversations allow your congregation to build a compassionate response, even if there is theological disagreement.

Remember that a faith-based conversation about building LGBT inclusion should be just that — faith-based. The issue should be acknowledged as profoundly relevant to the values and actions of the congregation. The facilitator can set the tone by sharing their own deeply-held beliefs. For example:

- ▶ As you begin the conversation, mention your faith tradition: “I am ...”
- ▶ Connect your faith tradition to your actions in the world: “My faith tradition teaches me to treat others the way I want to be treated and to love all of my neighbors (Matthew 7:12).”
- ▶ Evoke the example that Jesus set in His ministry as a model for how we live today: “I

look at the way that Jesus ministered and showed unconditional love to all and I wonder how I might do the same.” “Part of Jesus’ ministry was to create an inclusive family that included the marginalized. How might I do the same within my immediate community?”

Conversations on this topic can be challenging for all concerned. Often, you’ll find a wide range of personal experience, knowledge and attitudes. It’s important that the facilitator model the key asset of active listening and work to ensure that all voices are heard. Below are some things to keep in mind:

- ▶ Rather than dwell on theological arguments based in scriptural condemnation of things like same-sex practices, focus on core Christian values, such as love, compassion, grace, mercy, justice, unity and/or forgiveness.
- ▶ When the conversation does touch on passages that are often interpreted as condemnation of people who are LGBT, follow the guidelines set out in “Talking About the Bible,” which is available for download at www.hrc.org/religion.
- ▶ The common question, “What would Jesus do?” might actually be helpful in the context of this conversation. His actions, as described in the Gospels, are consistently inclusive, welcoming and compassionate.
- ▶ Consider raising the issue of the congregation’s responsibility to the larger community. What steps can be taken to break the cycle of violence and harassment being experienced outside and in some cases inside your walls?

ADDRESSING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

It is possible that issues of religious liberty might come up in your conversation. Religious freedom is guaranteed in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and is a grounding principle of our democracy. Clergy will always have the choice about who they want to marry and how they choose to conduct worship.

As an organization working with faith communities that are new to this conversation, we fully honor the process by which religiously affiliated organizations address LGBT inclusion — as long as it’s in accordance with local and federal laws.

For questions about how laws affect your faith community, please contact the Human Rights Campaign at (202) 628.4160. For information about how LGBT-inclusion looks in a different faith group’s polity and church structure, review our faith positions at www.hrc.org/religion.

FACILITATING A SMALL GROUP CONVERSATION IN “HEALTH AND WELLBEING” CONGREGATIONS

SMALL GROUP CONVERSATION (1 hour 30 minutes)

OVERVIEW

These dialogues are a starting point for your congregation or faith community to talk about the experiences of people who are LGBT in faith communities. These conversations are designed for small groups of no more than 10 to 15 people. You'll want to be sure everyone has an opportunity to participate so try not to let the group get too big. Read “Tips for the Facilitator” in this section and follow the steps in this outline to get started.

MATERIALS

- Flipchart or chalkboard
- Markers or chalk

GOAL

To broaden awareness about the health and well-being of people who are LGBT.

AGENDA OUTLINE

| ACTIVITY | FORMAT | TIME |
|---|------------------|------------|
| ▶ Introduction & Prayer | Facilitator | 5 minutes |
| ▶ Ground Rules | Group Discussion | 10 minutes |
| ▶ Need for Dialogue | Group Discussion | 30 minutes |
| ▶ Inclusive Statements | Group Exercise | 25 minutes |
| ▶ Day-To-Day Worries and Actions | Group Discussion | 15 minutes |
| ▶ Closing & Prayer | Facilitator | 5 minutes |



INTRODUCTION & PRAYER (5 minutes)

Once you convene your group, you may feel it's appropriate to begin with a prayer that responds to the tradition or needs of the group. There are some suggested prayers in the "In the Sanctuary" section of this guide, which you can use. Designate an individual to lead and close the group in prayer.



GROUND RULES (10 minutes)

After the prayer, begin the conversation with a reminder of the love and care that lies behind the impulse for greater inclusion. You should then lead with the following exercise to establish ground rules for the conversation.

Facilitator Can Say:

"Before we get started, it is important that we have some shared understanding about ground rules in order to create a safe space for everyone who is present. Let's take the next 10 minutes to review some ground rules I've prepared, and we can also expand this list for today's conversation."

Prior to the meeting, prepare some initial ground rules on the flipchart or board, such as speaking from your own experience (use "I" not "they" or "we"), or listen actively and don't interrupt people when they're talking. Read through the suggested ground rules. Once you finish, invite participants to modify or share additional ground rules for the conversation. Ask the group if there is a shared consensus on the ground rules, and once there is, adopt them before beginning the conversation.



NEED FOR DIALOGUE (30 minutes)

After this activity, keep the conversation going and make sure it's open, flexible and on topic. Take a moment to specify your goals and the reality that prompts the need for dialogue.

Facilitator Can Say:

"As people of faith, a group of us have been discussing our responsibilities in making our community safe and welcoming for all people. Our goal today is to take steps in that direction."

The following prompts help clarify your objectives. Spend about 30 minutes facilitating dialogue on these questions.

Facilitator Can Ask:

“Have you ever thought about the safety of people who are LGBT in our community? What do you think that experience might be?”

“A majority of people who are LGBT in a recent HRC survey said that ‘preventing violence and harassment in their community’ was their top concern. How does this affect your perspective on our greater community?”

“Have you ever met a person who is LGBT who experienced violence or harassment in the community? How did you respond (or how would you respond)?”

“Imagine the experience of a youth who is LGBT in our community. What would they struggle with? Consider the experience of their parents. What are their fears and worries?”

“The word ‘sanctuary’ is an architectural term that refers to our primary worship hall. What other meanings does the word have, and how might they be relevant to this conversation?”



INCLUSIVE STATEMENTS EXERCISE (25 minutes)

Following this discussion, let the group know that they will now spend some time considering what message the congregation is sending with its current policy on LGBT issues. If they don't have one, this would be a great space to discuss what a commitment can look like.

Facilitator Can Say:

“Let's take a moment to talk about the ways we can make our congregation(s) safe and more inclusive of people who are LGBT. An inclusive statement is a way that we can send a message that our congregation welcomes all. Let's talk through a sample commitment statement.”

Write out one of the following commitment statements on the flipchart or board. If the group is not ready to discuss an inclusive statement, share the draft “Health and Well-Being” commitment. If your group feels they are ready to discuss an inclusive policy for their congregation, discuss the draft “Inclusive Statement.” Have either commitment written

out on the large pad of paper or board in advance of the conversation. Read the statement out loud for the group.

DRAFT Health and Well-Being Commitment

Our welcome extends to persons of all races, ages, sexual orientations, gender identities, physical or mental abilities, economic statuses, cultures and ethnicities. We affirm that every person has worth and is a bearer of God's image. Although we have a diversity of opinion about the biblical guidance on marriage between same-sex couples, we believe we are called to create loving places where people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) will feel included as part of our church family. We pledge to continually work to create more openness and understanding, and to stay in regular dialogue with the LGBT community about how best to do so. We agree not to speak in ways that can directly cause harm to people who are LGBT and their families.

DRAFT Inclusive Statement

Our welcome extends to all persons of all races, ages, sexual orientation, gender identities, physical or mental ability, economic status, culture and ethnicity. We affirm that every person has worth and is a bearer of God's image. No matter who you love, how you look, or what you do, we welcome and affirm you in the full life of the church. Many people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and their families have been or are ostracized by their faith community. We believe that people who are LGBT are a gift from God and are fully embraced by our congregation. As Christians, we are called to unconditionally love everyone.

Facilitator Can Ask:

“What are some initial reactions to this statement? Is there anything you'd change?”

“What does it mean to be a bearer of God's image as it pertains to our unique sexual orientations and gender identities?”

“Do you think members of your faith community would react positively to this statement? Would you feel comfortable adopting this statement for your congregation? Why or why not?”

Spend time modifying the draft statements as a group with a pen or marker until it meets the needs of the group. No matter which statement you discuss, the most important thing to stress to the group is the need for ongoing dialogue. There is no commitment to implement this policy in order to participate in the activity.

After spending no more than 25 minutes, conclude the activity by reading the final statement. Please consider scanning a copy of the final edited commitment and email it to the HRC Religion & Faith Program staff (religion@hrc.org). You can end with a final question.

Facilitator Can Ask:

“How do the actions of the church — and the message it sends — align with your core Christian values? Remember that this action is only a beginning and that continued dialogue to build understanding is essential to creating loving spaces for people who are LGBT and their families. “

**DAY-TO-DAY WORRIES AND ACTIONS** (15 minutes)

Conversations about inclusion and the love of neighbors can become overly philosophical and avoid immediate, day-to-day worries and actions. Participants should feel they are in a safe space to voice their feelings. It might be helpful to end the small group conversation exploring the following questions. This should take no more than 15 minutes.

Facilitator Can Ask:

“Do you feel you can freely advocate for the safe treatment of people who are LGBT? What challenges and opportunities do you see as your congregation takes this step?”

“What would inclusion look like in your congregation?”

“What might be the ripple effect of a change in church policy? Is there a fear of losing existing members? Is it possible that church membership would grow with the inclusion of LGBT persons and those who love and support them?”

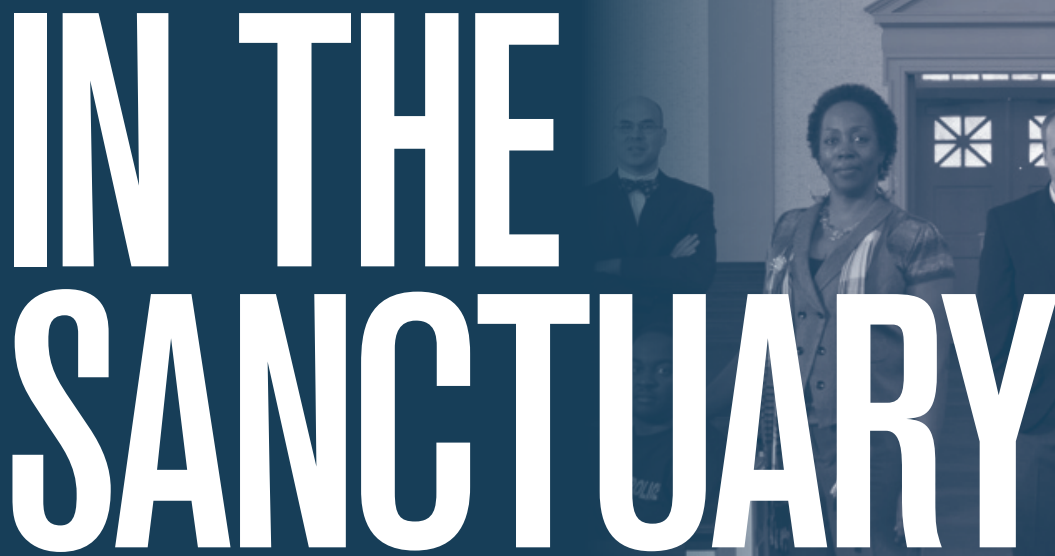
“How will the discoveries of this group be shared with the congregation and with church leadership? Are you ready to take that step?”

“What next steps might you take in becoming better informed on this topic?”

**CLOSING AND PRAYER** (5 minutes)

After the conversation, you can end in prayer and thank participants for showing up. It's important to also provide participants with resources and opportunities for additional learning and conversation. If you are planning another small group conversation, let the group know about that. Also let participants know they can receive a copy of the “Christian Conversation Guide: Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces for People Who Are LGBT” by contacting religion@hrc.org.

IN THE SANCTUARY



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Each faith community has its own place on the broad continuum of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) inclusion. As you move forward on that continuum, consider the suggestions that follow as steps to support your journey. Some might be immediately applicable; others might be goals to move toward. All of them will help your community come closer to creating welcoming, inclusive, safe spaces for everyone who walks through your door.

LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

As a community member, lay leader or volunteer, you can do many things to build a more inclusive environment for people who are LGBT. We encourage you to engage your community through any of the following actions:

- 1** If you or members of your faith community are new to this dialogue, host a “small group” conversation using the enclosed guide.
- 2** Talk to people — have conversations with members of your congregation, friends, neighbors and family. Discuss the importance of creating safe communities for people who are LGBT. Host gatherings for conversation and fellowship.
- 3** Make the enclosed “Useful Terms: A Glossary” available as a resource to your house of worship and congregants. Many folks in your congregation will want to learn more about inclusive language and how different terms can impact the LGBT community.
- 4** Make a commitment with your leadership team to host at least four “small group” conversations within your congregation throughout the year.
- 5** In collaboration with others, discuss and develop a “Health and Well-Being” commitment statement and pledge to not speak in ways that can directly or indirectly cause harm to people who are LGBT, their friends and families. Post this commitment on your website and/or a public space inside your congregation for all congregants and visitors to see. For guidance on how to develop this statement, see the “inclusive statements” activity in the “Hosting a Small Group Conversation” section of this guide.
- 6** Encourage your senior minister, pastor and other church leaders to pledge to become an inclusive congregation. Complete the enclosed “Clergy Commitment” form in this section and submit it to the Religion & Faith Program at HRC’s Foundation.
- 7** Host prayer services, conversations or dialogues focused on compassion and love for people who are LGBT, and invite other faith communities to join. For suggested themes, see the enclosed, “Themes for Sermons and Religious Education.”
- 8** Schedule and host regular Bible study opportunities for your congregants using some of the enclosed discussion readings. This is a great way to create and sustain ongoing dialogue within your faith community.
- 9** Develop an inclusive statement or policy that expresses your congregation’s support and affirmation of people who are LGBT. Post this statement or policy on your website and/or a public space inside your congregation for all congregants and visitors to see. For guidance on how to develop this statement, see the “inclusive statements” activity in the “Hosting a Small Group Conversation” section of this guide.
- 10** Publish personal stories of congregants who are LGBT and their families in your faith community newsletter or blog. When people see their lives reflected in the stories of others, it builds relationships and support.
- 11** Promote local organizations or events that address the needs of people who are LGBT as a way for the congregation to engage with a wider community.
- 12** Depending on your role, write a sermon, Sunday school lesson or religious education curriculum dedicated to intentional welcome, inclusion and action directed towards the compassionate treatment of people who are LGBT. As a starting point, you can use the “Themes for Sermons and Religious Education” section of this guide.
- 13** In collaboration with congregational leadership, present a statement to support employment non-discrimination policies. Make that support as public as possible. Having workplace protections for people who are LGBT is a key step toward creating safer communities overall.
- 14** Email your story to HRC (religion@hrc.org) about why you believe in welcoming and affirming LGBT people inside and outside of the church.
- 15** Finally, if there are other activities that have worked for you, please let us know! Contact us at religion@hrc.org.

PRAYERS

As you deepen the conversation around creating an inclusive community, consider adopting a focused prayer practice that is consistent with the values of your congregation. Prayers can be used to open or close gatherings, and to begin one-on-one conversations. They help create an atmosphere for the respectful sharing of ideas and for active listening. You can adapt any of these to meet the needs of your group.

PRAYER 1

Gracious God,
We are reminded every day, through the complex beauty of the world around us, that You are a lover of all Your creation. You give life, redeem life and stay with us forever — nudging us forward into the great goodness for which we were created. Thank You for loving us no matter what. Thank You for standing with us no matter the forces against us. Thank You for giving us the strength to live and love another day. Hear our prayer, Holy Spirit, to make a home for all people, in all churches that call themselves the body of Christ. May we work today toward healing for those who have been hurt and harmed in the very places that house Your Spirit. And may we work to do everything in our power to create a safer world for our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender brothers and sisters. Amen.

(Adapted from “There Is No Power But God” Prayer, by Rev. Adriene Thorne.)

PRAYER 2

Heavenly Father,
We know You are the God who changes not. You are the same yesterday, today and forever, and Your eyes are always on the righteous. Here we stand as Your children, seeking to better understand Your will for our lives. All we want to do is please You. So, on this day, as with every day, we come to You for wisdom and guidance. Show us the way that will keep us on the straight and narrow path that leads only to You through Jesus Christ, our Lord. All these blessings we ask in His name. Amen.

PRAYER 3

Dear Lord,
You speak to us through Scripture. You speak to us through the voices of the oppressed. You rejoice with us through the uplifted. You pray with us through the church. You remind us through Your voice and presence that You are always with us, and that You are always speaking to us. Keep us talking. Keep us listening. And speak to us through each other. Amen.

(Adapted from Duncan, Geoffrey. *Courage to Love Liturgies for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002.)

PRAYER 4

Spirit of Life and of Love,
Today we open our hearts and minds to You, striving to recognize through Your presence the great and glorious complexity of the world around us. As we open ourselves to the many wonders and mysteries of the human race, we ask for the wisdom that comes with understanding experiences outside of our own. We ask to enter into the joys and sorrows of people whose journeys may seem distant from ours, but who share a common goal: to live fully and joyfully in the world that we share. Blessed be, and amen.

PRAYER 5

Dear Lord Jesus,
We come together and give thanks for Your love of us, and all Your good creation. We ask You to speak through us as we carefully listen for Your guidance to help us live compassionately in accordance to Your will. Guide us as we work to better understand the many ways we can serve our neighbors with greater love and compassion. Help us as we work to practice understanding and learn to leave all judgment in Your hands. We ask that Your Holy Spirit work through us as we listen to You and to each other, and work to create a world that is shaped in Your vision of unconditional love of all creation. Thank You, Jesus. Amen.

THEMES FOR SERMONS AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

As you prepare or guide the content of sermons and religious education curricula, look for opportunities to link issues of LGBT inclusion to the foundational values that ground your congregation. This section includes a few familiar themes that pave the way for the compassionate welcome and inclusion of people who are LGBT. Keep in mind that in some communities, particular language may be an inspiration and in others it may not. Pay attention to the language that communities use to express their idea of the highest good. For instance, in some spaces “justice” is held out as inspirational and something we as Christians should strive to bring into being. For other congregations, justice is a word of suspicion that translates into activism and will turn people off. It is important to pay attention to the core values professed by a community before developing your themes.

Whether speaking from the pulpit, in conversation or in the classroom, be mindful of the words you choose. In addition to avoiding disrespectful terms, avoid using the language of “us” and “them.” Focus, instead, on how “we” are all part of the same community.

It’s also good to avoid comparing the support of people who are LGBT to Jesus’ love for the “unclean” or “social outcast.” In addition to encouraging negative attitudes to people who are LGBT, this approach emphasizes the difference between people, rather than the divine light we all share. It is, however, powerful to ground your discussion in the Gospel stories. Jesus created a profound ministry for the most marginalized and showed how they are loved by God and can be an instrument for God’s vision of beloved community.

LOVE: Love is universally extended to all people. There is nothing we can do in our lives to make the Divine love us more and there is nothing we

can do that will make the Divine love us less. Love is what moves in the midst of the darkness of fear and hate, bringing light that allows people to be seen as the beloved of the Divine. All people have been created to love and be loved.

MERCY: Mercy is found and experienced among those who are in community. Our faith community becomes like a large extended family when all of God’s beloved people are intentionally invited to join. It is in community that we are able to see reflections of our story in the stories of others. The whole person (heart, mind and soul) is opened to a new understanding of mercy when they are able to journey through life with others.

COMPASSION: Compassion fills a person when they are able to see the needs of others. How do you and your faith community choose to fully see the needs of your brothers and sisters in God’s inclusive family? How is the heart of your community moved to respond to the compassion that fills it? How does your congregation recognize and name the needs of people who are LGBT?

JUSTICE: Through justice, a community can transform its belief in love, mercy and compassion into action. What steps is your faith community taking to show people who are LGBT that you see them, see their needs, and are committed to acting in solidarity with them? Be bold in encouraging compassion for people who are LGBT and reaffirm the importance of all people in God’s extended family. Your work is not done until all people are welcome at the table and are able to exist in society as fully equal.

USEFUL TERMS: A GLOSSARY



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In order to create a safe space to explore these complicated issues, it's important to choose the right language. Words like “homosexual,” for example, are outdated and should be avoided. Words like “faggot,” “dyke” or “tranny,” are derogatory and offensive. The words “trans” and “transgender” can be used interchangeably to describe people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. These pages will help guide your language choices.

To have a productive discussion about sexuality, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, explore the terms listed below. Always remember, though, that terminology is always changing as people live into their identities in new ways.

ALLY: Someone who supports members of a community other than their own. In the context of the LGBT community, "ally" is often used to refer to non-LGBT people who advocate and support LGBT people.

BISEXUAL: A person who is physically, romantically, emotionally and/or relationally attracted to more than one gender, though not always at the same time, in the same way or to the same degree.

CLOSETED: An adjective that describes people who have not disclosed their LGBT identity, or who have only told a few people. The person is "closeted" and has not "come out of the closet." Often, people do not disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity for safety reasons.

COMING OUT: The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share it with others. Coming out happens many times over the course of a lifetime.

COMMUNITIES OF COLOR: An inclusive term that typically refers to people who are not white.

DYKE: A derogatory term for a lesbian. Some lesbians have reclaimed this word and use it as a positive term, but it is still considered offensive when used by the general population.

FAGGOT (OR FAG): A derogatory term for a gay man. Some gay men have reclaimed this word and use it as a positive term, but it is still considered offensive when used by the general population.

GAY: An adjective used to describe a person whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or relational attractions are to people of the same sex.

GENDER IDENTITY: One's internal, personal sense of their own gender. For many transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match.

GENDER EXPRESSION: External manifestation of one's gender identity, usually expressed through "masculine," "feminine" or gender-variant behavior, clothing, haircut, voice or body characteristics. Many, transgender people seek to match their gender expression to their gender identity rather than their birth-assigned sex.

HETEROSEXUAL: An adjective that describes people whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or spiritual attractions are to people of a different sex. Also: straight.

HOMOPHOBIC/TRANSPHOBIC/BIPHOBIC: Fear, hatred, anger, discomfort, intolerance or lack of acceptance toward LGBT people.

HOMOSEXUAL: An outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive by many LGBT people. "Gay" and "lesbian" are more commonly accepted terms to describe people who are attracted only to members of the same sex.

INTERSEX: A person whose biological sex is ambiguous. There are many genetic, hormonal or anatomical variations that make a person's sex ambiguous (i.e., Klinefelter syndrome or congenital adrenal hyperplasia). Parents and medical professionals usually assign intersex infants a sex, and in some cases, even perform surgical operations to conform the infant's body to that assignment. This practice has become increasingly controversial as intersex adults speak out against the practice, accusing doctors of genital mutilation.

LESBIAN: A woman who has emotional, physical, spiritual and sexual attractions to other women.

LGBT: Abbreviation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender.

LIFESTYLE: Avoid using this term. Just as there is no one straight lifestyle, there is no one bisexual or gay lifestyle.

QUEER: People who are not heterosexual and/or who do not conform to rigid notions of gender and sexuality. For many LGBT people, this word has a negative connotation since it was historically used as a derogatory term when referencing LGBT people. However, some LGBT people believe it is an inclusive term and feel comfortable using it.

SAME-GENDER LOVING: A term typically used in communities of color as an inclusive way to describe people with same-sex attractions.

STRAIGHT SUPPORTER: A heterosexual person who supports and honors LGBT diversity, acts accordingly to challenge negative remarks and behaviors, and explores and understands his or her own bias. It is important to note that many transgender people are straight. See also Ally.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: An individual's enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or spiritual attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people may be heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual. For example, a trans woman who is attracted only to other women is also a lesbian.

TRANSGENDER: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically and may identify as male, female, gender queer, agender, or other terms.

TRANSEXUAL: A term that is no longer widely used. Use transgender unless the person self identifies as transexual.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The HRC Foundation's Religion & Faith Program works to create a world where nobody is forced to choose between who they are, who they love and what they believe. Below are a few additional resources developed by our team. To learn more about these resources online, visit: www.hrc.org/religion. To speak to program staff about accessing any of the resources, contact us via email (religion@hrc.org) or by phone (202.216.1524).

A LA FAMILIA

This comprehensive, multi-faceted program geared toward Latino Christian communities aims to facilitate conversations around the intersections of faith, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity and family. Our program has components ranging from facilitated dialogues conducted by our 30 national facilitators to local trainings involving community and faith leaders who wish to enhance Latino participation in civic discourse leading to LGBT inclusion.

"BEFORE GOD, WE ARE ALL FAMILY"

This video features the compelling journey of five Latino families who reconcile their unbreakable love for each other and their deep commitment to living faithful lives in the face of religious-based intolerance of those with different sexual orientations and gender identities.

COMING HOME TO FAITH, TO SELF, TO SPIRIT: LGBT GUIDE

This guide is aimed for those who hope to lead their faith communities toward a more welcoming stance, and those seeking a path back to beloved traditions. Because each faith tradition is built upon its own complex history and doctrine, this guide offers general, overarching insights and suggestions.

FAITH POSITIONS ON LGBT-INCLUSION

Many religious organizations have issued statements officially welcoming LGBT people as members, including the solemnizing of same-sex marriage, and the ordination of clergy who are openly LGBT. Visit our "Faith Positions" on the HRC website (www.hrc.org/resources/entry/faith-positions) for an in-depth overview of different religious organizations' position on people who are LGBT and the issues that affect them.

SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR RELIGIOUS & THEOLOGICAL STUDY

This project seeks to encourage and promote dialogue on LGBT issues and religion in seminaries and, by extension, in our congregations and communities. In partnership with

Vanderbilt Divinity School, HRC provides 15 graduate and post-graduate students with a week-long intensive program to encourage and promote dialogue on LGBTQ issues.

TRIUMPH THROUGH FAITH

Produced by the Human Rights Campaign, this guide offers practical, field-tested steps to engage people of faith, their clergy and community leaders in the ongoing struggle for equality and justice. Drawing on strategies employed in five state campaigns (Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina and Washington), this guide and its accompanying educational programs share the tools that made faith a critical factor in the marriage equality victories of November 2012.

TALKING ABOUT THE BIBLE

This resource provides pointers on how to initiate thoughtful, compassionate and productive conversations on Scripture.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT "HOMOSEXUALITY?"

This publication provides an overview of how the Bible addresses LGBT-related issues, and how scholars have responded over the centuries.

OTHER READINGS

A Letter to My Congregation: An Evangelical Pastor's Path to Embracing People Who Are Gay, Lesbian and Transgender into the Company of Jesus, Ken Wilson

A Lily Among the Thorns: Imagining a New Christian Sexual Ethic, Miguel A. De La Torre

Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships, David Brownson

Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism, Patricia Hill Collins

Do No Harm: Social Sin and Christian Responsibility, Stephen G. Ray Jr.

God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships, Matthew Vines

Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? Another Christian View, Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

Mom, I'm Gay: Loving Your LGBTQ Child Without Sacrificing Your Faith, Susan Cottrell

No More Goodbyes: Circling the Wagons Around Our Gay Loved Ones, Carol Lynn Pearson

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Resource for Congregations on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, Cody J. Sanders, Paul Smith, Peggy Campolo, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Brian Ammons and Mahan Silar

Science, Scripture and Homosexuality, Alice Ogden Bellis

Sex + Faith: Talking with Your Child from Birth to Adolescence, Kate Ott

Sexuality and The Black Church: A Womanist Perspective, Kelly Brown Douglas

Spirited: Affirming the Soul, Lisa C. Moore

The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety and Public Witness, Raphael G. Warnock

The Good Book: Reading the Bible With Mind and Heart, Peter J. Gomes

The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities, Delroy Constantino-Simms

The Holy Spirit and Preaching, James A. Forbes

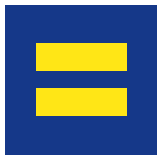
Their Own Receive Them Not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches, Horace L. Griffin

Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays vs. Christians Debate, Justin Lee

Transgendered: Ministry, Theology, and Communities of Faith, Justin Tanis

Understanding the Black Church: The Dynamics of Change, Kelly Brown Douglas and Ronald E. Hopson

Where The Edge Gathers: Building a Community of Radical Inclusion, Yvette Flunder



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