

Taking a New Look:

**Why Congregations Need
LGBT Members**

A LifeQuest Publication

**Taking a New Look:
Why Congregations Need LGBT Members**

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*“You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your strength, and with all your mind;
and your neighbor as yourself.”*

Luke 10:27 [NRSV]

Introduction

How do you feel about the welcome and acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people into the life of the church? And how do you feel about the protection of their rights in our society?

Some persons reading this booklet have already determined that they are supportive of full inclusion of LGBT persons in the life of the congregation. If you have that conviction, you are probably also supportive of the rights of LGBT persons in society. You may not have made up your mind about the right to marry for gay and lesbian people, but you are likely supportive of civil unions.

Others reading this booklet may not be so enthusiastic about the full inclusion of LGBT persons in the life of the church. You may be uncomfortable about homosexuality, and you may have been taught that homosexuality is a sin. You may have concerns about how the active involvement of homosexual persons in the congregation would affect the overall life of the church. You may be uncertain about what the words bisexual and transgender describe.

And you may be like millions of other Christians in North America and simply not be sure how you feel about the involvement of LGBT persons in the life of your congregation. You're aware of the tremendous controversy surrounding homosexuality and aren't sure what to think. While you may have some uncertainties, you are uncomfortable with the harsh language that you sometimes hear expressed about LGBT people.

There are also many people who readily acknowledge that they don't have a good understanding of homosexuality and as a result are reluctant to take a position about welcoming and accepting such persons into the life of a congregation. And many people who have a

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good understanding of homosexuality find themselves uncertain about what it means to be bisexual or transgender.

Of course most of us don't fit neatly into predefined categories, and it may be that none of the preceding paragraphs accurately describe where you are at on the topic of LGBT persons and the church. We're simply wanting to reflect the reality that persons of many different opinions are reading this booklet.

Many persons who are personally supportive of the involvement of LGBT persons in the life of the church are in congregations that are not especially welcoming to LGBT persons. Clergy and others in positions of leadership are sometimes reluctant to speak out on behalf of the involvement of LGBT persons because of the amount of controversy surrounding this in our society. In one study, Christian Community found that 64% of the clergy in mainline and evangelical Protestant congregations believed that the protection of the rights of LGBT persons is a matter of religious concern, but only 7% of those clergy have expressed that conviction in any congregational or community setting.

It's easy to be focused on what a congregation risks if it becomes fully welcoming and affirming of gay and lesbian persons, bisexual persons, and transgender persons. There will be people who will disapprove, certainly outside of the congregation and often inside the congregation as well. There are persons who might pull back on their attendance, their financial support, or their volunteer commitment to the church. Some may threaten to remove their names from membership if LGBT persons are fully included. Concern about these responses causes many people who are personally supportive of LGBT persons to remain quiet about the question of fully welcoming them into the faith community.

That perspective, however, misses the reality that there is a cost to not being fully welcoming and affirming of LGBT members. Persons who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender are fully as much the children of God as those who are heterosexual. They have also been given rich spiritual gifts from God for building up the body of Christ.

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A congregation that is not fully welcoming and affirming of LGBT persons pays a price for that position.

You may have received this booklet in the mail from Christian Community or from another organization. You may have been given the booklet by your pastor or someone else in your congregation. You may have ordered it over the Internet because the title and content interested you. Whatever the route by which this booklet has come to you, we hope that you will read it with an open mind and consider the possibility that congregations are missing many blessings from God because they are not fully inclusive of LGBT persons.

Those of you not familiar with Christian Community may be interested in knowing a little more about the organization responsible for this booklet. Christian Community is a nonprofit research and resource development organization with a mission of improving the health of congregations and of the communities in which congregations minister. Over 18,000 congregations representing over thirty different denominations have participated in our research projects and utilized our resources. We have developed resources to help congregations improve their stewardship, their hospitality, their ability to adapt to changing worship, their ability to attract new people and to grow, their ability to become more multicultural, and their ability to help teens be better prepared for sexual decision-making, dating, marriage, and parenting. This booklet is an outgrowth of a project focused on helping congregations better understand LGBT people. That project has included a survey of 1,511 clergy and other religious leaders, interviews with 268 clergy, work with 61 pilot congregations, and conversations in numerous focus groups to better understand the questions and concerns church members have about LGBT people.

The next several pages of this booklet focus on some of the positive reasons why LGBT members are needed in our churches. You may have some factual questions about LGBT persons and about what the Scriptures have to say. If that is the case, you can find further help in the Appendix to this booklet.

The words of Luke 10:27 stand as a reminder to us that love is at the heart of the Christian life:

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*“You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your strength, and with all your mind;
and your neighbor as yourself.”
Luke 10:27 [NRSV]*

The lawyer with whom Jesus shared those words pushed Jesus further by demanding to know “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus responds to that question by sharing the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus made the hero of this story a Samaritan person, who would have been despised by some of those who first heard this parable. These words remind us that all people are our neighbors.

Grandchildren & Other Factors

A prominent church leader and retired university president, whose name would be immediately recognized by many if we used it here, found his view of homosexuality challenged when his twenty-year-old grandson came out as gay. He described it in this way:

“I’ve always been pretty conservative on this issue. I recognize that the Bible doesn’t say a great deal about homosexuality, but what is there has always seemed to me to be prohibitive. But now I find myself with a grandson, who never wanted to be gay, who has concluded that it is part of who he is, part of how God made him.

*“I held that little boy in my arms thirty minutes after his birth, and he has spent at least a week in my home every year of his life. I’m starting to take a new look at what the Bible says about sexuality, and I’m paying more attention to the Genesis story of creation, the context of the relatively small number of prohibitions, and the strong teachings of Christ about love. I haven’t sorted it all out theologically, but I have to say this: A grandson trumps theology. You are looking at a new gay rights activist.” (From *Widening the Welcome of Your Church* by Fred Bernhard and Steve Clapp)*

The way that most of us feel about LGBT rights depends on a number of factors. Certainly those of us who are members of congregations are influenced by clergy, the Scriptures, official denominational positions, and what others in the congregation think and believe. We are also strongly influenced by our relationships, by compassion, and by love. Those, like the church leader just quoted, who have warm feelings for a friend or family member who comes out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, may change the weight they give other factors.

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Many people reading this booklet do not have a close friend or family member who has acknowledged being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. If you are not close to someone who talks about such an identity, it can be especially difficult to sort out thoughts and feelings about LGBT people.

When we visited with people around North America as part of the research for writing this booklet, we encountered many people of deep faith who grew up being taught that homosexuality was wrong, who had heard very little about bisexuality, and who had heard even less about persons who would describe themselves as transgender. These persons of faith have deep love of God and of other people but have difficulty understanding LGBT people and how the church should respond to them.

There are also people who know and like LGBT persons but who feel like the sexual conduct of those persons goes against what Scripture and the traditions of the church have taught. These persons feel pulled between their basically warm feelings toward the LGBT persons they know and their understanding of Scripture and tradition. While they can understand the deep emotion that caused the retired university president to say that “a grandson trumps theology,” they aren’t ready to make that kind of statement themselves.

Whatever your experiences with LGBT persons have been, we hope that the pages ahead will help convey a helpful perspective on what the church gains by the involvement of these persons.

The Need for LGBT People in Congregations

1. The welcome and acceptance of LGBT persons in congregations contributes to a positive image of Christianity, especially among young adults, many of whom have rejected the church.

Sadly the reverse of this is often true today. The harshness of many denominations and congregations toward LGBT people has contributed to a negative image of the Christian faith, particularly among people in their twenties and thirties, both inside and outside the church. Large numbers of mainline and evangelical Protestant congregations have suffered significant membership losses over the last three decades. The losses have been especially severe among people in their twenties and thirties.

Christian Community did a study of the views of younger adults (18–35) and older adults (36 and older) who are active in the life of 610 congregations. Younger adults who are active in those churches differ significantly from older adults in their opinions on several issues in church life and in society. This was especially true in the area of sexuality. For example:

- Even though they are active in the life of a congregation, 74% of the younger adults do not feel that church involvement is “essential” to the faith in contrast to 21% of older adults. Sixty-one percent of the young adults feel that the church functions too much like any other institution in society in contrast to 31% of older adults.
- Young adults are much more likely to feel that sexual harassment is a major problem at their places of work.

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- Ninety-three percent of young adults feel that talking about sexual issues and concerns is helpful and appropriate to do in church settings; only 39% of older adults agree with that view.
- Young adults are almost three times as likely as older adults (81% versus 28%) to feel that homosexuality is not a sin and to feel that homosexuality is not something that people “choose” but rather that some people simply “are” homosexual.

When one considers that such great differences exist in perspective between younger adults and older adults who are active in the church, it is not surprising that it is difficult to retain young adult involvement and to reach new young adults. In that study, 87% of the young adults who are church-active said that they withheld their beliefs and opinions a significant amount of the time because they knew older members would disapprove of their views, especially regarding sexuality.

David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons of the Barna Research Group have written a book titled *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity. . . And Why It Matters* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007). In this book, Kinnaman and Lyons point out that Christianity in general and evangelical Christianity in particular have gained a negative image with people outside the church and even with people in their twenties and thirties who are inside the church. They warn that many younger people see Christianity as too judgmental, too narrow, and too antihomosexual. They warn evangelical Christians that “we have become famous for what we oppose, rather than who we are for” [p. 26].

While the book deals with much more than attitudes toward homosexuality, that is a major focus of the concern of Kinnaman and Lyons. They report that 91% of young adults outside the church say that “antihomosexual” accurately describes present-day Christianity [pp. 92-93]. Most young adults attending church are not convinced that homosexuality is a problem in society, and “they are embarrassed by the church’s treatment of gays and lesbians” [p. 101]. The book’s authors urge a warmer, more charitable view of gays and lesbians. This is especially interesting since Kinnaman and Lyons are in fact opposed to homosexual behavior and make that clear in the book, but they

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recognize that antihomosexual rhetoric from churches has caused a significant image problem for the faith.

Just changing the rhetoric, however, isn't enough to turn around the image of the church. While less harsh words about LGBT people may help soften the image of Christianity, people inside and outside the church are not going to be fooled by a simple change in words. Churches that are willing to fully incorporate LGBT people into congregational life send by their actions a deeper message than any words can send.

2. Congregations with inclusive attitudes and practices toward LGBT people make themselves much more attractive not only to LGBT people but to many others as well. Becoming a welcoming and accepting congregation can create an atmosphere in which church growth can happen.

Obviously LGBT people are far more likely to attend worship, participate in other activities, and in time become members of congregations that are welcoming and affirming of them. Estimates on the percentage of LGBT persons in North America range from 3% to 8%. Even at the lowest end of the range, the numbers involved are very significant. Churches who welcome and affirm LGBT people can expect to see growth in other categories as well including:

- Those who are family members of LGBT people and want to be a part of a faith community in which their loved ones are fully accepted.
- Those who are young adults and have a more accepting view of LGBT people. Such young adults may be more open to invitations to participate in a welcoming and accepting church.
- Those of any age who are accepting of LGBT people and who want to be in a faith community that is accepting of them.

Since the United Church of Christ went on record as being fully accepting of LGBT people, there certainly have been some congregations that have reacted negatively and even withdrawn from

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the denomination. What has not gained so much attention is the reality that many United Church of Christ congregations that embrace the denomination's broad hospitality are experiencing growth, not just from those who are LGBT but also from those who are attracted to the warmer, more inclusive environment.

In the process of doing the research on which this booklet is based, Christian Community in fact encountered congregations of many different denominational traditions that practiced a broad, biblical hospitality and that are growing as a result. In a society in which people experience rejection and judgment in many different settings, people are hungry for the kind of full and healthy acceptance that such congregations have to offer.

The media have fed on stories of churches that withdrew from denominations because of more accepting positions on LGBT issues. People who are working against LGBT acceptance in some denominations work to create the impression that welcoming and affirming churches are likely to lose members. Making meaningful comparisons between congregations, however, is very difficult because of the large number of variables that contribute to church growth and decline. Those who want to argue against LGBT acceptance can select examples to confirm their position, but the overall direction of what is happening in congregations in North America does not support their position.

Christian Community's research over the last decade affirms that churches with a broad hospitality, including full acceptance of LGBT persons, are very likely to grow if they do the other things that make for church growth. These growing churches are characterized by:

- A broad, biblical hospitality that is extended to all people, regardless of race, economic level, physical ability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.
- A membership that is comfortable reaching out to persons who are not in the church and inviting them to participate in worship and other congregational activities.

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- Careful follow-up on visitors to worship and other activities so that people know they are valued and wanted in the life of the church.
- Clearly articulated beliefs and values, accompanied by an openness to those who disagree.
- A genuine openness to new people with a willingness to include those who are new in positions of leadership and in the social networks of the congregation.

With or without LGBT acceptance, churches that do not reach out to nonmembers, do not provide a warm welcome to guests, and do not positively assimilate new people are not likely to grow. Churches that do those things and that reflect a broad, biblical hospitality are in an excellent position for growth. For a more thorough discussion on this, see the new Christian Community book: *Deep and Wide: Hospitality and the Faithful Church*.

3. Welcoming and accepting congregations gain the considerable gifts of LGBT clergy, other professional staff, and members.

Many congregations in North America are dealing with a crisis of leadership. Several major denominations do not have an adequate supply of clergy for their churches, and many also find it difficult to find high quality Christian education directors, youth workers, music directors, and other professional staff. Many congregations also find it difficult to fill all the positions on boards, councils, commissions, committees, mission groups, and task forces with talented lay persons.

Denominations that are not willing to license and ordain LGBT people into ministry have lost many outstanding candidates. The same is true for other professional positions in congregations. In the process of carrying out the research on which this booklet is based, Christian Community encountered literally hundreds of stories of talented people who wanted to enter the ministry or other church employment but felt barred from it because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Many of these individuals were seminary trained or had significant

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church experience that was highly valued until they came out as LGBT. One bishop said to us, “It breaks my heart that we are so desperate for leadership that we license for ministry some people who truly do not have the gifts, and then we turn away so many talented people because of sexual orientation. The kingdom of God is hurt by these choices.” We heard similar sentiments expressed by many other leaders in mainline and evangelical denominations.

LGBT people who join local congregations bring with them rich gifts that can nurture congregational life. Christian education programs, service programs, music programs, and many other congregational activities can be enriched through the gifts of LGBT people. There are stereotypes of gay and lesbian people being especially gifted in the areas of music and artistic expression. In the process of doing our research, we have found many LGBT people who indeed are quite talented in music and other arts; but we also have found LGBT people who are skilled at teaching, evangelism, fundraising, marketing, and management. The reality is that God has poured out gifts on all people. We lose those of LGBT people when our churches are unwelcoming.

4. Welcoming and accepting congregations become safe places for LGBT youth and for youth who are struggling with their questions of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Christian Community conducted a separate study, known as the *Faith Matters* study, on the sexual values and behaviors of teenagers who are involved in congregations. In that study, we surveyed 5,819 teens across the United States who are involved in congregational life.

If we had a preconceived idea of what we would find about the sexual orientation of teens who were involved in faith-based institutions, it was that we would likely discover a smaller percentage of teens self-identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual than has been found in secular studies. Our assumption was that teens of homosexual or bisexual orientation would be somewhat less likely to be involved in a faith-based institution, given the number of traditions with a negative view of homosexuality.

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In looking at the results, it's important to be aware that forming a sexual identity is a developmental task of the adolescent years. Some sexuality education professionals report that as many as 25% of twelve-year-olds are unsure of their sexual orientation but that only 5% of eighteen-year-olds have that same uncertainty.

What we found, in fact, was that a surprisingly high number of teenagers who are involved in faith-based institutions self-identified as homosexual or bisexual. In fact most secular studies have reported lower percentages of teens who self-identify with homosexual or bisexual orientation than we found. As we have shared the results with clergy and other congregational leaders, most have been surprised by the percentage of teens who didn't identify a heterosexual orientation. Remember that these figures reflect self-identification of orientation, not behavior:

| | <u>Males</u> | <u>Females</u> |
|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Heterosexual | 86% | 89% |
| Homosexual | 7% | 5% |
| Bisexual | 5% | 4% |
| Don't know | 2% | 2% |

Those figures are among the highest percentages of gay, lesbian, and bisexual teens that have been identified in any study. We do not necessarily conclude from this that congregational teens are more likely than secular teens to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual. We do think that the way in which our study was conducted made it more likely for teens to feel safe in expressing their sexual orientation than has been the case in some other studies. Studies, for example, that rely on telephone interviews of teens are very likely to find gay, lesbian, and bisexual orientation and behavior under-reported.

The *Faith Matters* study clearly shows that most congregations have some teens who self-identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. There are also teens who are unsure about their orientation. Many of these teens have concerns both about how to relate their sexual orientation to their faith and about how accepted they would be if their sexual orientation were known by the congregation.

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We found that almost all the congregations participating in the *Faith Matters* study had at least one teen who self-identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning his or her orientation. ***Eighty-six percent of those teens, however, said that their clergy person was not aware of their orientation or their struggle; 46% of them indicated that their parents did not know about their orientation or their struggle.*** When we surveyed the clergy in those congregations, only 18% thought that they had one or more GLBT teens in the congregation, and only 12% knew the name of a gay or lesbian teen.

Most of these teens do have at least one young person in the faith-based institution who knows about their orientation, so they are not completely isolated. Eighty-three percent indicated that there was at least one young person in the faith-based institution who was aware of their orientation, but only 16% said that the whole youth group or class knew about it. Very few of them have felt sufficiently comfortable to “come out” to their entire youth group or class.

Non-heterosexual teens in our study were almost twice as likely as heterosexual teens to have seriously considered or to have attempted suicide. This should be a matter of significant concern for those of us in faith-based institutions. And almost all the clergy with whom we visited in the interviews as part of the process leading to the booklet you are reading right now indicated that they are very concerned about this fact.

There have been some recent secular studies indicating that non-heterosexual teens may not be as much at risk for suicide and depression as previously thought. We wonder if it is possible that the risk for religious teens is slightly higher because of the frequent conflict between their orientation and the anti-gay teaching or silence of their congregations.

If the teens perceived that their pastor or another adult in the church felt “open, accepting, or nonjudgmental” about matters of sexual orientation and gender identity, they were much more likely to have talked with someone in the congregation about the topic. Those who were able to be open in their faith-based communities were also less likely to have considered suicide than other non-heterosexual teens in

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this study. Those who are in faith-based institutions where there are negative views toward homosexuality and bisexuality rarely are open about their orientation. Those teens live with a very painful silence.

In congregations that have taken a position as welcoming and affirming of LGBT people, teens feel safe to talk about their orientation with others in the youth group, with their minister, and with adults in the congregation. The congregation becomes a safe place for these teens, and many of them are desperately in need of such a safe place.

5. Welcoming and accepting congregations make it possible for LGBT persons who are already members to be open about their identity and fuller participants in the life of the church.

It is almost impossible to obtain accurate statistics on the percentage of people already active in congregations who are LGBT but who remain relatively quiet about their orientation. There are, to our knowledge, no studies that have been done on adults in congregations comparable to the *Faith Matters* study on teens that was discussed in the last section of this booklet. Anecdotally, however, we know that there are large numbers of LGBT people who choose to be active in a faith community but who keep silent in that setting because they fear rejection if people know their orientation.

For many years, some states like Minnesota and Montana that had grueling winters had a strategy known as **storm homes** to help protect children. If a winter storm came up during the day and it wasn't possible for children to travel from school to their own homes at the end of the day, they had designated storm homes closer to school to which they could go to spend the night and be safe. Regardless of age, all people need places where they can feel safe being open about who they are.

LGBT people living in North America have lives that are often difficult. Discrimination in employment, services, and benefits continues to exist; and LGBT people must weigh carefully the consequences of being open about their orientation. Personal safety is frequently a concern, and many LGBT people are subject to hurtful words and actions or even physical violence when they choose to be

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open in some settings. The church, as a setting offering hospitality to all who claim Christ as Lord, should be the ideal storm home for LGBT people and for those who love them.

Unfortunately, many LGBT people feel that they must be closeted if they are to be active in a faith community. Congregations that are welcoming and accepting give room for those people to come out of the closet and to fully experience the love and acceptance of the community of Christ.

6. Welcoming and accepting congregations can provide support to families and friends of LGBT persons who have in the past felt unable to safely talk about their questions and concerns.

For every LGBT person in North America, there are multiple family members and friends who love and care about that person. Parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, grandchildren, and friends connected to LGBT people need safe places to talk about their questions and concerns.

PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) is an organization that exists to provide a safe place for these persons to share their concerns. PFLAG is a wonderful organization that has done great good, and some PFLAG groups meet in church facilities. But many families and friends of LGBT people are not connected with PFLAG. The church itself should be a safe place for these people to share questions and concerns.

Family members and friends need to feel that they can openly talk about their questions and concerns in the faith community. They should feel comfortable openly approaching their minister, talking about concerns with church friends, or raising issues in a Sunday school class or Bible study group.

Many family members and friends who are involved in faith communities do not feel that they can ask questions and raise concerns in those settings. This is especially true if they have heard negative or even hateful statements about LGBT persons from the pulpit or in classes or groups at church. An openly welcoming and affirming

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position from the church changes the atmosphere. When Christian Community conducted the Faith Matters study on teenagers and sexuality, we heard many statements like these made by parents in focus groups:

My son is gay, but I know he doesn't talk about it in church. And I don't feel as though I can talk about it in church. He's in the closet, and his father and I are in the closet too. I think there probably are others in the church who have a son or daughter who's gay or lesbian, but I don't know who. We don't feel we can be open, and I'm sure others are in the same position.

In my Sunday school class and in my small group at church, we've helped each other through some tough situations: divorce, the deaths of spouses and children, heart attacks and cancer. But when our daughter said to us that she was lesbian, I felt like people at church would be too shocked and couldn't handle it. But aren't we supposed to have the kind of love at church that can handle anything?

The minister at our church preaches about homosexuality like it's a condition afflicting people out there in the secular world. He has no clue that my sister is lesbian. I also feel sure there are a couple of gay kids in the youth group at church. I am very uncomfortable when I hear him saying such condemnatory things about gay and lesbian people when I know how deep the faith of my sister is. I wonder how the parents of gay kids in the youth group feel when they sit in worship.

A welcoming and accepting position from the church that is known and embraced by the whole congregation creates an atmosphere in which not only LGBT people but those who care about them can be open and be helpful to one another.

7. Welcoming and accepting congregations are in a better position to offer sexuality education for children, teens, and adults.

When Christian Community asked clergy in the *Faith Matters* study what their approach was to sexuality education in the congregation, here's how they responded:

- 14% said the congregation offers a reasonably comprehensive approach to sexuality education.
- 49% said the congregation offers a limited amount of information and/or discussion in existing classes or groups.
- 37% said the congregation does almost nothing.

Fewer than 14% of the youth responding in the *Faith Matters* study indicated that they had received any significant information in the congregation about contraception, preventing HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, rape, or understanding sexual orientation. Clergy, adult youth workers, and the teens themselves acknowledged that congregations need to do considerably more to prepare teens for healthy sexual decision-making, dating, marriage, and parenting.

While the *Faith Matters* study did not survey congregations about the amount of age-appropriate sexuality education provided to children or adults, discussion in focus groups made it clear that very few congregations are doing much with those younger or older than teens.

Readers of this booklet will not be surprised to learn that, when we asked denominational officials and local church clergy for the reasons why more effort wasn't made to provide comprehensive sexuality education, the most frequent response was fear of conflict if such initiatives were undertaken. That acknowledgment was frequently followed by examples of denominational-level conflicts over topics related to sexuality, with homosexuality being the most frequently reported source of tension.

Congregations that make a decision to be welcoming and affirming of LGBT people have taken a major step in removing one of the

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barriers to greater congregational openness to sexuality education. The benefits of age-appropriate sexuality education for children, teens, and adults are many:

- In the *Faith Matter* study, a third of 11th and 12th grade girls reported unwanted sexual experiences. Instances of sexual abuse of children, youth, and adults are of deep concern to all of us. While there is no single action that can keep people completely safe, sexuality education can provide knowledge and skills to help people be safer.
- The *Faith Matters* study found a subcategory of teens who were significantly less likely to have had sexual intercourse or oral sex than the other teens in the study. This subgroup reported no instances of teen pregnancy and no instances of HIV. One of the characteristics those teens shared was being in a congregation that provided information on how to make sexual decisions and on what the Scriptures say about sexuality.
- We don't stop being sexual beings when we become adults! And we also don't stop having questions about sexuality. The Christian Community study reported earlier in this booklet found that 93% of church-involved young adults feel that it is helpful and appropriate to talk about sexual issues and concerns in church settings.

8. Welcoming and accepting congregations demonstrate the kind of expansive hospitality that God expects of us.

In biblical times, people who traveled were not able to make reservations at a Hilton, Sheraton, Embassy Suites, Red Roof Inn, or Residence Inn. They didn't have chain restaurants available everywhere they traveled. A journey across the desert was a dangerous and often unpleasant endeavor. People throughout the Mediterranean world regarded the provision of food, lodging, and protection as a virtue and sacred duty. The survival of travelers could depend on that hospitality.

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But the biblical concept of hospitality covers far more than the provision of safety for travelers. Hospitality is an obligation that we have to all those with whom we come in contact, including strangers and those who make us feel uncomfortable.

Genesis 18:1–15 describes the hospitality of Abraham toward three men who appeared near the entrance to his tent. In *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Terence Fretheim offers this perspective: “From the narrator’s point of view, Yahweh appears to Abraham at his home (v.1). From Abraham’s point of view, however, three men stand near him (v.2). Yahweh has assumed human form appearing among the three men; the other two are angelic attendants” [Vol. I, p. 462–463].

Consistent with the practice in the Ancient Near East, Abraham offers hospitality without being aware of the divine presence. In sharing the fatted calf and the butter, Abraham and Sarah gave even more than custom required. They chose to treat the three men as honored guests, and they did so without expecting anything in return. In verses 9–15, one of them tells Sarah that she will have a son. The fact that the gift of a child was promised can be seen as a response to their hospitality, but the promise of a son had already been made in the preceding chapter. The hospitality existed for its own sake, and Abraham has been lifted up as a model because of it.

Had Abraham and Sarah refused hospitality to the strangers, they would have shut themselves off from the blessings God intended—not just the blessing of a son but also the blessing of God’s presence. When we fail to practice the kind of broad hospitality that God expects, genuinely welcoming those who may even make us feel uncomfortable, we are shutting ourselves off from the blessings that God wishes to extend to us. And as we learn to know and understand people, our level of comfort changes with those who started out being guests becoming our friends, our brothers and sisters in the faith.

In the New Testament, we find the practice of hospitality directly linked to its practice in Judaism. As in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament passages, **the New Testament accounts do not focus the issue on the worthiness of the stranger but rather on the**

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faithfulness of the one from whom hospitality is sought. Several passages give helpful perspectives to us; for example:

- **Matthew 26:6–13** gives an account of Jesus in the home of Simon the leper. Going to the home of a leper would have been unacceptable to the religious establishment, but Jesus does so without hesitation. While he is there, a woman pours a costly ointment on his head, showing a hospitality which foreshadows his burial.
- **Luke 10:29–37** tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan. This well known parable answers the important question: “Who is my neighbor?” The parable strongly reinforces that all people are our neighbors, and the obligation to care for others cuts across all religious, ethnic, and economic lines. It also cuts across lines of sexual orientation and gender identity.
- **Luke 14:12–24** includes the Parable of the Great Dinner, in which Jesus advocates that the one who extends hospitality invite “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” [v.13–14]. Jesus repeatedly urged people to reach out to those whom society was tempted to ignore.
- **Luke 19:1–10** shows Jesus again with one of the people the religious authorities would have avoided— this time with Zacchaeus the tax collector. A similar reference is found in **Luke 5:27–32** in which Jesus eats with “a large crowd of tax collectors” [v.29].
- **John 13:1–20** describes Jesus’ washing the feet of the disciples at the time of the Last Supper. Jesus not only accepted the hospitality of others, but he also displayed hospitality through his entire ministry. The ritual or ordinance of washing the feet of another goes back to the custom in the Ancient Near East and is a clear affirmation of the value put on the one who is the guest.

- **Matthew 25:31–46** presents an account very similar in some ways to that in Genesis 18, shared earlier. We are told to reach out to those who are hungry, naked, homeless, or imprisoned. When we show hospitality to such persons, it is as though the kindness was actually being shown to Christ.
- **Hebrews 13:1–2** encourages us to show “hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Whether we think of encountering an angel in the stranger, as suggested in Hebrew 13, or the actual presence of Christ, as suggested in Matthew 25, there is no question about the importance placed on hospitality to the stranger—including lepers, Samaritans, the poor, tax collectors, and other marginalized persons.

The Bible urges the broad practice of hospitality, the recognition of Christ in all those we encounter. It also makes it clear that real hospitality isn’t just a matter of initial friendship to bring people into the life of our congregations. True hospitality is something that we make part of our daily lives and also part of daily life in the church community.

9. Welcoming and accepting congregations can stand firmly for human rights and justice not only for LGBT persons but for all people.

Some clergy told Christian Community staff in interviews that the reason they are reluctant to do more advocacy for LGBT rights and for a warmer welcome to LGBT persons in the congregation is that there are other causes that seem to them more pressing. Causes that they named include world hunger, global warming, child abuse, and the war in Iraq. Certainly most Christians agree that those causes are very important.

But the passages in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament and the New Testament do not seem to suggest that some human rights and justice issues should be set aside in order to work on other issues. Do

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we really want to say to LGBT persons: “Well, your concerns and needs are important, but they aren’t as important as other concerns, so we can’t deal with them right now”? When is the time in the future when it would be better to deal with the human rights and justice concerns of LGBT people? If we take seriously the parable of the Good Samaritan, then we should be concerned about the needs of the neighbor who is in front of us.

The rights issues for LGBT persons are significant. In 31 states, a person can still be fired for reason of sexual orientation, and in 39 states a person who is transgender can be fired. LGBT persons face significant barriers on adoption; on the right to hospital access for partners who are ill; to marriage or civil union; and to many other aspects of life, depending on the state. As shared earlier in this booklet, non-heterosexual teens in congregations are almost twice as likely as heterosexual teens to have seriously considered or attempted suicide.

By being a welcoming and accepting congregation for LGBT persons, a church sends a clear message that human rights and justice are important for all people in all places and times. Rather than being in conflict with other human rights and justice issues, being an advocate for the rights of LGBT persons sends a clear message of how important justice is to a congregation.

Matthew 10:40–42 points out that those who welcome the disciples of Christ are in fact welcoming Christ himself. The passage goes on to say, “whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.” Welcoming and acceptance are closely linked to human rights and justice.

Consider again the words of **Matthew 25:31–46** in which we are told to reach out to those who are hungry, naked, homeless, or imprisoned. When we show compassion to such persons, it is as though the kindness was actually being shown to Christ:

Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then

he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me” [v.45–46].

In this passage, Jesus makes it clear that we are not to reject the needy stranger like the son of man who was rejected and crucified. The stranger is to be welcomed, accepted, fed, and clothed. Welcoming the stranger opens the door to building relationships and developing deeper communion with one another and with God.

We need to apply these words not only to persons with physical needs but also to those with spiritual needs. Some of us who may do well relating to someone with less income than we have may find ourselves having more difficulty relating to those in the faith community who have strong personalities, who haven’t learned how to get along well with others, who make us feel uncomfortable because of having a different sexual orientation, and so the list could be continued. Recognizing the presence of Christ in others can truly change how we feel about them and how we relate to them.

10. Welcoming and affirming congregations can set people free of the personal distress and even damage to the soul caused by the disconnect some silent friends of LGBT people have between their personal convictions and their public vocalization.

In the process of conducting the surveys and interviews on which much of this booklet is based, we encountered many clergy who are best described as *silent friends* of LGBT people. These are clergy who favor the full welcome and affirmation of LGBT people as members of the congregation, who support the rights of LGBT people in society, and who favor the licensing and ordination of LGBT people to ministry. But these clergy have, for the most part, remained silent in their congregations and in their denominations. They fear the controversy of being openly supportive of the welcome and inclusion of LGBT people.

Ninety-three percent of the clergy in our study say that they *personally* support laws that protect the civil rights of homosexual persons. Fewer than 10% of those persons, however, have expressed

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that conviction in the congregation or in a public setting. In an earlier study, we found that 64% of clergy believe that the protection of the rights of LGBT persons is a matter of *religious* concern, but only 7% of them have expressed that conviction in their congregation or in a public setting. Again, *silent friends* seems like an accurate description.

But many of these clergy are not comfortable with their silence. Here are some of the things we heard from clergy in the silent friends category:

The gay and lesbian people in my denomination must be disappointed in me. On a personal level, I fully accept them and would be delighted to be pastoring a church that was truly welcoming of them. But I've done nothing in my church to encourage that kind of openness; I've never spoken up at Annual Conference; and I haven't been supportive of the Reconciling Ministries Network. I've been too afraid of starting controversy or of getting in trouble with my district superintendent. But come to think of it, I don't even know how my superintendent feels about these issues.

I have a lot of guilt. I've talked to the person who directs the advocacy group in my denomination many times, and I know she has a very difficult job. I feel as though I should speak out, but I worry about the consequences. I know there are some people in my church who would be very critical of me. I've let my fear become more important than my faith.

When I was younger, I worked hard against the Vietnam War and on behalf of civil rights. I've always been a big advocate for a greater role for women in the denomination. If I were younger and had less to lose, I think I would be more openly supportive of gay and lesbian rights including ordination. But I'm pastoring a two thousand member congregation, and some of my members are very conservative. I have an obligation to protect the fiscal well-being of the church. If I speak out on gay and

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*lesbian issues, I'm afraid that I'll be hurt personally
and that I'll damage the church. . . . The truth, of course,
is that the church is damaged by my not speaking out.*

We heard statements like those from clergy in every denomination in which we did surveys and interviews. These are people living with considerable tension between what they personally believe about LGBT concerns and what they have said in public and worked to bring about in their congregations. This kind of strong disconnect is very uncomfortable for people of faith who genuinely care about others and want to do the right thing. When congregations become welcoming and accepting, they set people free from this kind of tension and even damage to the soul.

The Time Is Right

Certainly working to help a congregation become more welcoming and accepting of LGBT people carries some risk. As shared earlier in this booklet, there are people who will disapprove; and there is always the possibility that they will express that disapproval through withholding their attendance or financial support and also through voicing their dissatisfaction. As this booklet has shared, however, there are many blessings that congregations lose when they are not fully welcoming and accepting of LGBT people.

The benefits of welcoming and accepting LGBT people and of working for their rights within denominations and within society are, we feel, far greater than the risks of not doing so. The surveys and interviews that we conducted in preparing this booklet leave us convinced that we are at a time of great opportunity for progress on LGBT acceptance in congregations, for more accepting policies in denominations, and for more religious people to become advocates for justice toward LGBT people in society.

As shared in this booklet, the views of most young adults both inside the church and outside the church are definitely more accepting of LGBT people than the views of some older adults. As we seek to create a positive future, we need congregations that embrace young adults, LGBT people, the families of LGBT people, and all those who care about LGBT people.

Please take a few moments to prayerfully consider what your next step should be on LGBT issues. Here are some possibilities and resource suggestions:

- If you have still have serious concerns about welcoming LGBT people into your congregation, you may not be ready to take proactive steps at this time. We want to encourage you to seek opportunities to become better acquainted with LGBT people. This may have an impact on the way that you view

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their involvement in the church and may help with some of your concerns.

- If you have a lot of factual questions about how people develop sexual orientation and about issues of gender identity, consider ordering the publication *A Time To Seek: Study Guide on Sexual and Gender Diversity* by Timothy Palmer and Rev. Debra W. Haffner.
- If you are ready to move ahead working for greater LGBT acceptance in your congregation, consider ordering the book *LGBT Rights: A Strategy Manual for People of Faith*. You can also gain from a connection with the welcoming and accepting organization within your denomination, and they can direct you to denominationally specific resources.
- Begin to practice being a positive ally by challenging anti-LGBT comments; not assuming that everyone is heterosexual; and using language that is inclusive of LGBT people.
- If you especially want to create a safe place for LGBT youth in your church and help teens be better prepared for sexual decision-making, dating, marriage, and parenting, consider ordering *Faith Matters: Teenagers, Religion, and Sexuality* and *The Gift of Sexuality: Empowerment for Religious Teens*.
- Work with the Christian education committee or similar group in your church structure to prepare your congregation for a discussion about the needs of all teens, including LGBT young people.
- If you want to work with the hospitality frame to help your church become more welcoming and accepting of all people, including LGBT people, consider the new book *Deep and Wide: Hospitality and the Faithful Church*.
- If you want to work for greater welcoming and acceptance and for broader LGBT rights within your denomination, including the right to ordination, we urge you to be in

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contact with the welcoming and accepting organization in your denomination. That organization is best prepared to guide you in efforts to make a positive difference. They will welcome your interest.

Wherever you are at on these issues and concerns, we encourage you to pray for your local congregation, your denomination, LGBT people, and all those in our society in need of greater love and acceptance from faith communities. Then put those prayers into action by committing yourself to the creation of a kinder and more just world.

Appendix A: Resources

Resources Available from Christian Community

Taking a New Look: Why Congregations Need LGBT Members.

This is the booklet you are holding in your hand! You may find it helpful to obtain copies for other people in your congregation. Quantity pricing is available.

Silent and Undecided Friends: Motivating Great LGBT Rights Advocacy Among Clergy and Congregations. This report gives the results of our extensive surveys and interviews with North American clergy.

LGBT Rights: A Strategy Manual for People of Faith. This manual, being released in the spring of 2008, provides a wide range of strategies for working on greater LGBT acceptance in congregations and in other settings. The manual is based not only on the surveys and interviews referred to in this booklet but also on pilot work with 61 congregations. Available Spring, 2008.

A Time to Seek: Study Guide on Sexual and Gender Diversity by Timothy Palmer and Rev. Debra W. Haffner. This publication provides very helpful factual information that can help faith communities understand and respond to sexual and gender diversity.

And God Loves Each One by Ann Thompson Cook. This is an attractive, easy-to-read booklet that gives an introduction to issues of sexual orientation and is designed to initiate dialogue in the church. *Made in God's Image* is a companion booklet that helps people understand gender differences.

Faith Matters: Teenagers, Sexuality, and Religion by Steve Clapp, Kristen Levertton Helbert, and Angela Zizak. This book

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gives the results of a national study of 5,819 teens from thirty different denominations showing how their faith and congregational activity relate to their sexual values and behaviors. It includes valuable information on gay and lesbian teens.

The Gift of Sexuality: Empowerment for Religious Teens is an outgrowth of the *Faith Matters* project and is designed for use by teens in congregational settings. An *Adult Guide* is also available.

Deep and Wide: Hospitality and the Faithful Church by Steve Clapp, Fred Bernhard, and Ed Bontrager. This book, designed for congregation-wide study, helps congregations look at what it means to have a hospitality that is deep and wide enough not only to bring people into membership but to thoroughly assimilate them into the life of the church. The book talks openly about the inclusion of sexual minorities as part of the church's ministry.

For information on ordering those resources, contact Christian Community at the address, phone, e-mail, or website listed below.

Organizations

Christian Community
6404 South Calhoun Street
Fort Wayne, IN 46807
260-456-5010
800-774-3360
DadofTia@aol.com
www.churchstuff.com

Religious Institute for Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing
21 Charles Street, #140
Westport, CT 06880
203-222-0055
www.religioustheology.org

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Institute for Welcoming Resources
(Part of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force)
810 West 31st Street
Minneapolis, MN 55408
612-821-IFWR (4397)
www.welcomingresources.org/index.htm

Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists
P.O. Box 259257
Madison, WI 53725
608-255-2155
www.wabaptists.org

Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and
Transgender Interests
P.O. Box 6300
Minneapolis, MN 55406
612-343-2060
www.bmclgbt.org/index.shtml

Coalition for LGBT Concerns
United Church of Christ
2592 West 14th Street
Cleveland, OH 44113
800-653-0799
www.ucccoalition.org

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Ministries
United Church of Christ National Offices
700 Prospect Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44115
216-736-3217
<http://www.ucc.org/lgbt/>

Covenant Network of Presbyterians
2515 Fillmore Street
San Francisco, CA 94115
415-351-2196
www.covenantnetwork.org/home.htm

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Dignity USA (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Catholics)

P.O. Box 15373

Washington, DC 20003-5373

800-877-8797

www.dignityusa.org

Evangelicals Concerned

P.O. Box 19734

Seattle, WA 98109-6734

866-979-3297

www.ecwr.org

Gay and Lesbian Acceptance (GALA) (Community of Christ)

P.O. Box 2173

Independence, MO 64055

www.galaweb.org

GLAD (Gay, Lesbian, Affirming Disciples) (Disciples of Christ)

P.O. Box 44400

Indianapolis, IN 46244-0400

www.gladalliance.org

Integrity (Episcopal Church USA)

620 Park Avenue, #311

Rochester, NY 14607-2943

800-462-9498

www.integrityusa.org

Kinship International (Seventh Day Adventist)

P.O. Box 69

Tillamook, OR 97141-0069

www.sdakinship.org

Lutherans Concerned / North America

P.O. Box 4707

St. Paul, MN 55104-0707

651-665-0861

www.lcna.org

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More Light Presbyterians
4737 County Road 101, PMB #246
Minnetonka, MN 55345-2634
505-820-7082
www.mlp.org

Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns
Unitarian Universalist Association
25 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02108
617-742-2100, ext. 301
www.uua.org

Reconciling Ministries Network (United Methodist)
3801 N. Keeler Avenue
Chicago, IL 60641
773-736-5526
www.rmnetwork.org/index.html

Reconciling Pentecostals International
34522 N. Scottsdale Road D-8, Suite 238
Scottsdale, AZ 85262
480-595-6517
www.rpifellowship.com/index.html

Room for All (LGBTs in the Reformed Church in America)
26 Railroad Avenue, Box # 341
Babylon, NY 11702
www.roomforall.org

Sanctuary (Moravian Church)
P.O. Box 5053
Bethlehem, PA 18015
www.geocities.com/sanctuary_home/

Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns
(Quaker/Friends)
www.quaker.org/flgbtqc

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Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches
P.O. Box 1374
Abilene, TX 79604
310-360-8640
www.mcccchurch.org/

Affirmation (Gay & Lesbian Mormons)
P.O. Box 46022
Los Angeles, CA 90046
661-367-2421
www.affirmation.org

Appendix B: Definitions

The definitions which follow are taken from *A Time to Seek* by Debra Haffner and Tim Palmer and are used by permission. Some of these terms are often thought of as “binary,” defined by only two categories such as *male–female* or *gay–straight*. Many scientists think it is more appropriate to consider a range of possibilities rather than the rigid categories to which many of us are accustomed.

Sex. The biological characteristics that define human beings as male or female or intersex. **Biological sex** refers to physical characteristics such as external genitals, sex chromosomes, sex hormones and internal reproductive systems. **Natal sex** is the sex assigned at birth, which is typically based on the appearance of the external genitals. In cases where the genitals appear ambiguous, the chromosomes and hormones are then assessed to make the most appropriate sex assignment. Words that describe sex are female, male, and intersex. “Sex” is often, and inaccurately, used as a synonym for sexual intercourse.

| | | |
|--------|----------|------|
| Female | Intersex | Male |
|--------|----------|------|

Intersexual. An individual who has atypical development of physical sex attributes, including (but not limited to) external genitals that are not easily classified as male or female, incomplete development of internal reproductive organs, variations of the sex chromosomes, overproduction or underproduction of sex-related hormones, and variant development of the testes or ovaries. Some intersex characteristics are recognized at birth; others do not become apparent until puberty or later. Intersexuals were previously known as hermaphrodites. Some individuals now prefer the term **DSD** (disorders of sexual development) to refer to intersex conditions.

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Sexuality. The sexual knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviors of individuals. Its dimensions include the anatomy, physiology and biochemistry of the sexual response and reproductive systems; gender identity, sexual orientation, roles and personality; as well as thoughts, attachments, physical and emotional expressions, and relationships.

Sexual Identity. An individual's sense of self as a sexual being, including natal sex, gender identity, gender role, sexual orientation and sexual self-concept. Sexual identity may also refer to the language and labels people use to define themselves. **Sexual self-concept** refers to the individual's assessment of his or her sexual identity. Development of sexual identity is a critical part of adolescence.

Sexual Orientation. An individual's enduring romantic, emotional or sexual attractions toward other persons. "Heterosexual," "homosexual" and "bisexual" are examples of specific sexual orientations, although sexual orientation falls along a continuum that ranges from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality. Many people are attracted in varying degrees to people of the same sex and people of the other sex. It is important to note that:

- Sexual orientation refers to feelings and identity, not necessarily behavior. Individuals do not always express their sexual orientation through their sexual behaviors.
- Sexual orientation is not a choice. It is determined by a complex interaction of biological, genetic and environmental factors.

Asexuality. Little or no romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction toward other persons. Asexuals may also be described as **nonsexual**. Asexuality is different from **celibacy**, which is a choice not to engage in sexual behaviors with another person.

Bisexuality. An enduring romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction toward people of all sexes. A person who identifies as bisexual may live in relationships with a partner of the other sex or of the same sex. A bisexual may be more attracted to one sex than another, equally attracted to women and men, or may consider sexual orientation and gender unimportant. The intensity of a bisexual's attractions toward one sex or another may vary over time.

Heterosexuality. An enduring romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction toward people of the other sex. The term "straight" is commonly used to refer to heterosexual people.

Homosexuality. An enduring romantic, emotional or sexual attraction toward people of the same sex. The term "gay" can refer to homosexual women or men, while the term "lesbian" refers only to homosexual women.

| | | |
|--------------|----------|------------|
| Heterosexual | Bisexual | Homosexual |
|--------------|----------|------------|

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Gender. An individual's personal, social and/or legal status as female, male or transgender. Words that describe gender include "feminine," "masculine," and "transgender." Gender is a cultural construct that reflects a society's expectations for feminine and masculine qualities and behaviors.

Gender Identity. An individual's own sense of self as a woman, man or transgender. Gender identity may or may not conform to an individual's biological sex.

Gender Expression. The outward expression (behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice and/or body characteristics) of an individual's gender.

Gender Role. The cultural expectations of female and male behaviors.

Gender Variance. Gender identities, expressions or roles that do not conform to what society typically expects from an individual based on his or her biological sex.

| | | |
|----------|----------------|-----------|
| Feminine | Gender Variant | Masculine |
|----------|----------------|-----------|

Transgender. An umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the cultural expectations of their biological sex. Transgender people seek to make their gender expression match their gender identity, rather than their biological sex. The term "transgender" does not provide information about a person's sexual orientation; transgender people can be bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual or asexual.

Transsexual. A term for persons who believe that their natal sex is incompatible with their gender identity. Biological females who live as men are called female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals, transsexual men or transmen. Biological males who live as women are called male-to-female (MTF) transsexuals, transsexual women or transwomen. Transsexuals often pursue medical procedures such as hormone treatments or gender confirmation surgery (also known as sex-reassignment surgery) to make their physical attributes conform more closely to their gender identity. Transsexuals who pursue sex-reassignment surgery may refer to themselves as pre-operative ("pre-op") or post-operative ("post-op") transsexuals. Others dislike this terminology and prefer to say they are in transition.

Cross Dresser or Transvestite. An individual who regularly dresses in attire associated with the other gender, either for sexual excitement or emotional release, or in some cases, for performance art. Cross dressers can be any sexual orientation, but are primarily heterosexual men. Transvestites differ from transsexuals in that they do not want to alter their bodies. In the U.S., the older term "transvestite" is considered by many cross dressers to be offensive, but the usage and connotation vary by culture.

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LGBT / GLBT. A collective acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Lengthier versions include “LGBTQ” to include people who identify as “queer,” and “LGBTQQIA,” to include “queer, questioning, intersex and asexual.” The “a” may also be used to refer to “allies,” heterosexuals who support justice for LGBT persons.

Heterosexism. Similar to racism or sexism, this term refers to the privileging of heterosexuality over other sexual orientations, or to the assumption or assertion of heterosexuality as the preferred cultural norm.

Homophobia. Fear, dislike, hatred or prejudice toward homosexuality and homosexual persons.

Queer. Once a negative term for a lesbian or gay man, “queer” has recently been reclaimed by some gay people as a self-affirming reference for anyone of a non-heterosexual orientation or gender identity. It is best not to use this word to refer to specific individuals without their consent.

Questioning. Some individuals do not identify with any of the current terms that define sexual orientation or gender identity; others are struggling to understand their own sexual orientation and/or gender identity. They may choose to refer to themselves as “questioning,” “third gender”, “gender queer”, or they may choose no term at all.

Appendix C: Scripture

How does a person reconcile an accepting attitude toward homosexuality with some of the biblical passages that seem to say that homosexual behavior is a sin? If you read some of those passages without considering the context, it does appear that Scripture says homosexuality is a sin.

There was no concept of homosexuality in biblical times as we understand it today, and the word *homosexual* did not even exist at in biblical times. These were condemnations of sexual behavior between men, perhaps in reaction to the use of men and women as sacred prostitutes in nearby religious cults. Let’s take a closer look.

First, let’s consider the context of the passages most often quoted to show that homosexuality is a sin:

Genesis 19:1-11 really is an account of abuse and assault rather than an attack on homosexuality.

Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 20:13; and Deuteronomy 23:17-18 are part of what was called the “purity code” in Old Testament times. That same code also

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prohibits sex with a woman who is menstruating. Other passages in these Old Testament books require styles of dress that we no longer follow. People are also told to stone disobedient children! We do not, fortunately, put equal weight on every instruction found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Thus we should not automatically assume that the prohibition of same sex behaviors given here should be applied to life today.

1 Corinthians 6:9 has an uncertain meaning, and it depends on the translation used. The New International Version translates a word as “homosexual” that the New Revised Standard Version translates as “male prostitutes.”

Romans 1:26-27 seems one of the clearest New Testament prohibitions on homosexual behavior. Some biblical scholars, however, have pointed out that Paul is not speaking here about those born with a homosexual orientation. He seems to be speaking about persons who are heterosexual but are acting as homosexuals—against their own orientation.

1 Timothy 1:10-11 may well have been condemning not homosexuality but pederasty, according to many biblical scholars. Pederasty was the practice of male teachers exploiting their position with male students by requiring them to have sexual relations with them. Thus these were not consensual acts and involved adults with children. In our own time, we would condemn such acts whether they were homosexual or heterosexual.

Second, with all of the passages just identified, it’s important to remember that life was very short in biblical times. People were married at a very young age and had as many children as possible. Mary may have been as young as fifteen or sixteen when she gave birth to Jesus. With many people not living far into their thirties, family size was very important. In that kind of culture, it’s understandable that homosexual behavior would have been discouraged.

The fact that it may have been discouraged does not necessarily mean that it is a sin. There are biblical passages that urge celibacy [not having sex at all], prohibit divorce, or expect women to be subservient to men. We do not consider those passages authoritative today. Why should we give strong weight to the very small number of passages that talk about homosexual behavior, especially given the context of those passages?

This seems especially true since Jesus doesn’t mention same sex behavior in the gospels at all. Jesus never felt a need to reference homosexual behavior or to prohibit it. If it were a sin, why is Jesus silent on the topic?

Third, the Bible talks about the friendship of David and Jonathan, and some feel this could have been an erotic relationship, especially because of 1 Samuel 18:1. There is a Hebrew word that can be translated as ‘to gird, join, bind, or cling,’ which could imply a sexual connection between them. 1 Samuel 20:41 talks about their kissing each other, but that action does not itself make a homosexual relationship. The truth is that

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we simply do not know with certainty what the passages mean. It is certainly true that the Old Testament celebrates the strong friendship that David and Jonathan had.

Fourth, while there are a small number of passages that are taken by some as condemning homosexual behavior, there are a much larger number of passages which urge us to:

- Show love and acceptance of others in all our relationships.
- Show hospitality toward all people, welcoming them as we would welcome Christ.
- Work for justice for all people and care about those who are looked down on by others. Jesus reached out to the poor, to the hated tax collectors, to prostitutes, and to others not cared about by society.
- Forgive persons who behave in ways that are not acceptable. Condemnation is never the last word with God. Jesus urges us in fact not to focus so much on the misbehavior of others as on our own sins and shortcomings. For example, consider the passage in which Jesus tells people not to be focused on the speck or splinter in someone else's eye but on the log in their own [Matthew 7:1–5].

One of the best known teachings of Jesus is often called the Golden Rule and is part of the Great Commandment:

***You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart and with all your soul, and
with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.
Luke 10:27***

Then Jesus proceeds to define who our neighbors are by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, which in fact reminds us that all people are our neighbors [see Luke 10:25–37 for the full parable].

No one has any doubt that this is a commandment that applies to all of our lives. Those of us with a heterosexual orientation should ask ourselves how we would want to be treated if we had a homosexual orientation. We would want to be accepted and affirmed, as it seems clear Jesus would have done. Tony Campolo, a very respected evangelical leader, says this:

I believe that if Jesus were in our shoes, he would reach out in love to his homosexual brothers and sisters and demand that they be treated justly, that we end the discrimination that has too often made homosexuals into second-class citizens and denied them their constitutional rights. [Adventures in Missing the Point by Tony Campolo and Brian McLaren; Emergent YS Books/Zondervan, El Cajon, 2003, p. 178]