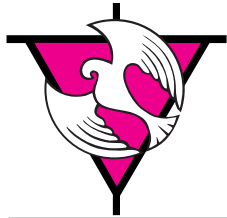


Filled with God's Spirit...



but will our church
accept their gifts
once they grow up?

NOTE: If this packet does not meet your needs, please forward to your congregation's Church & Society Committee.



Will Your Church Accept These Kids If They Grow Up Lesbian or Gay?

There are lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgendered persons in the families of every United Methodist congregation. Always have been, always will be. **The question is: *Does our church accept them? Can our ministry include them?***

Our *Book of Discipline* says,

“We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.”

(¶161.G)

Help is here. The Reconciling Ministries Network in the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference offers you these materials.

RESOURCE GUIDES IN THIS KIT

- Resource Guide #1 Sources for Learning about Lesbian and Gay Persons and Issues
- Resource Guide #2 When Someone You Know Is Lesbian or Gay plus a brochure format, from which copies may be made for a local church literature rack.
- Resource Guide #3 Parents and Allies of Lesbians and Gays Have Special Needs in Your Congregation, plus a copy of a brochure, “The Parents Reconciling Network.” It is available to order in quantity for a local church literature rack.
- Resource Guide #4 Including Non-Traditional Families in Leading Worship and Liturgy
- Resource Guide #5 Considering Holy Unions for Same-Gender Couples in Your Congregation
- Resource Guide #6 Understanding Homosexuality as Christians and Scholars
- Resource Guide #7 Study Guide for “To Plead the Cause” plus a copy of the booklet, “*To Plead the Cause*,” our theological study paper

Whatever you may feel personally about homosexuality, Resource Guides 1 through 5 contain suggestions of ways any pastor, or a church leader in any congregation, may expand ministry to the families with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered members.

We also want you to know our bias. Resource Guides # 6 and 7 represent our convictions, matters we hope you will seek to understand. Most simply, we believe that homosexuality is morally neutral, and therefore is fully compatible with Christian teaching.

Who are we? We are an unofficial annual conference unit of the national Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN), a growing movement of United Methodist individuals, congregations, campus ministries, and other groups working for the full participation of all people in The United Methodist Church. This year, the RMN encompasses 171 reconciling congregations, 24 reconciling Campus Ministries, and numerous other “reconciling” groups. Thousands and thousands of persons have signed up as Reconciling United Methodists. So can you.

Under existing church rules, we want to help pastors and leaders sort out what may and may not be included in a church's pastoral ministry. Here are some Disciplinary references regarding homosexuality.

- 1) "We are called to be faithful to the example of Jesus' ministry to all persons." (§138)
- 2) "Responsibilities and Duties of a Pastor:"
"To administer the sacraments...and other means of grace." (§331.1.b) "The decision to perform the ceremony (of marriage) shall be the right and responsibility of the pastor." (§331.1.i)
- 3) "(W)ithin the context of our understanding of this gift of God (human sexuality), we recognize that God challenges us to find responsible, committed, and loving forms of expression." "Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching, we affirm that God's grace is available to all." (§161.G)
- 4) "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches." (§332.6)
- 5) "We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons." (§161.G)
- 6) "Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for homosexual persons. We see a clear issue of simple justice in protecting their rightful claims where they have shared material resources, pensions, guardian relationships, mutual powers of attorney, and other such lawful claims typically attendant to contractual relationships that involve shared contributions, responsibilities, and liabilities, and equal protection under the law." (§162.H)

We offer three types of resources. First, some of our RMN members are available for individual consultation, in person, by telephone and by email.

Second, two web sites are available. The largest is that of the national Reconciling Ministries Network, with news, information and excellent resources listed at <http://www.RMNetwork.org>. Another is our Pacific Northwest Reconciling Ministries Network site at <http://ourclarkcounty.columbian.com/373/>.

Third, we offer this packet of resources, helpful whatever your personal feelings may be about homosexuality. We will be glad to receive your comments and respond to your needs. Your responses will also guide us in planning future publications.

#



Sources for Learning about Homosexuality

A few highly recommended resources to begin your study and build your library

SMALL BROCHURES & PAMPHLETS

- ▼ *Answers to Your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality*, pamphlet of American Psychological Association. Order from APA, 750-1st Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20002. Free.
- ▼ *Be Yourself*, booklet for young persons facing their own homosexuality. PFLAG, 1726 M St. NW, Washington, DC 20036. Single copy, \$1.80; quantity rates.
- ▼ *Finishing the Journey: Questions and Answers by United Methodists of Conviction*, Northaven UMC, 11211 Preston Road, Dallas, TX 75230-3457. \$3, OR free download at: <http://www.northaven.org>.
- ▼ *Homosexuality and the Bible*, booklet by Walter Wink. Order from Fellowship Book Store, P O Box 271, Nyack, NY 10960. \$1.50; quantity rates.
- ▼ *Is Homosexuality a Sin?* Quotes from church leaders, booklet from Metro Washington, DC, PFLAG, P O Box 34792, Washington, DC 20043-4792. \$1.50.
- ▼ *Our Children Are of Sacred Worth: Parents Reconciling Ministries*, information brochure, 3801 N. Keeler Ave., Chicago, IL 60641. Free.
- ▼ *Our Daughters and Sons*, booklet for parents and others seeking understanding of a lesbian or gay family member. PFLAG, 1726 M St. NW, Washington, DC 20036. Single copy, \$1.90; quantity rates.
- ▼ *To Plead the Cause*, a theological study paper on homosexuality and United Methodism, Pacific Northwest Reconciling Ministries Network, 5701 MacArthur Blvd., Vancouver, WA 98661. \$3.
- ▼ *Using the Klein Scale to Teach about Sexual Orientation*, new concept using eight variables of past and present, each with its own continuum, for rating a person's complex sexual orientation. Bobbi Keppel & Alan Hamilton, P O Box 10818, Portland ME 04104. Free. Or <http://www.biresource.org>.

BOOKS

- ▼ *Can Homophobia Be Cured: Wrestling with questions that challenge the church*, by Parents Reconciling Ministries founder Bruce Hilton. A classic. Abingdon, 1992, \$15 to \$18 where available or on line.
- ▼ *Congregations Talking about Homosexuality*, Beth Ann Gaede, ed., Speed Leas and others review case studies of seven congregations considering becoming “welcoming.” Alban Institute, 1998, \$13.25.
- ▼ *The Loyal Opposition: Struggling with the church on homosexuality*, by Amy Smith Delong & Tex Sample (eds.), essays by top scholars and church leaders. Abingdon Press. \$16.
- ▼ *Pastor, I'm Gay*, Howard Bess, a plea for ministers and members to accept the challenge of reconciliation. Order from Palmer Publishing Co., P O Box 3938, Palmer, AK 99645. \$13.
- ▼ *Stranger at the Gate: To be gay and Christian in America*, Mel White. The agonizing struggle of a devout minister before accepting himself as a gay Christian. Hardcover: Simon & Schuster; paperback: Dutton/Plume. \$12.55 to \$30 new and used on line.
- ▼ *We Were Baptized Too: Claiming God's Grace for Lesbians and Gays*, by Marilyn Bennett Alexander and James Preston. Collected stories and essays of 15 United Methodists addressing the issue of homosexuality and the church. Westminster John Knox Press. \$17.
- ▼ *Where the Spirit Leads: The evolving views of United Methodists on homosexuality*, James Rutland Wood. Careful study of the gradual yet distinct change in United Methodist attitudes toward homosexuality. Abingdon, 2000, \$15.

PERIODICALS

- ▼ *Open Hands*, quarterly periodical for pastors and congregations in ministry with l/g/b/t persons. Sponsored jointly by reconciling ministries in eight denominations. Each issue focuses on a specific area of concern in the church. Subscribe at Open Hands, 3801 N. Keeler Ave., Chicago, IL 60641. \$20/year.

VIDEOS

For videos on lesbian and gay issues, check with Annual Conference Film Library (206) 728-7462, your local PFLAG Chapter (see *Yellow Pages*), or a local film library.

- ▼ *All God's Children* – Political, social and religious African-American leaders on the important role of the church in commitment to equal rights for lesbians and gays. Discussion Guide available. 26 minutes. Woman Vision, PO Box 14546, San Francisco, CA 94114. Information at: <http://www.woman-vision.org/films.htm>.
- ▼ *Straight from the Heart – Issues of real parents coming to terms with a lesbian or gay child*. Discussion Guide available. Woman Vision, P O Box 14546, San Francisco, CA 94114. Information at: <http://www.woman-vision.org/films.htm>.

INTERNET WEBSITES

- ▼ *Reconciling Ministries Network* – National website containing news of the movement, coming events, resource papers, an extensive list of resources, some for free downloading, at: <http://www.RMNetwork.org>.
- ▼ *Pacific Northwest Reconciling Ministries Network*, activist United Methodists in Washington and Northern Idaho, including churches, campus ministries and individual Reconciling United Methodists. See our website at: <http://ourclarkcounty.columbian.com/373/>.
- ▼ *PFLAG—Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays*. Lists 450 local support groups, plus excellent resources in support, education and advocacy, some for free downloading, at: <http://www.pflag.org>.
- ▼ *Safe Schools Coalition of Washington* – Public-private partnership to make Washington State schools safe for sexual minority students. Offers reports and publications on school harassment and violence, training for school personnel and others, legislative updates, and a hotline to report anti-gay violence (1-888-307-9275). Website at <http://www.safeschools-wa.org/>.

ORGANIZATIONS

- ▼ Reconciling Ministries Network, a growing national movement of United Methodist individuals, congregations, campus ministries and other groups working for the full participation of all people in the United Methodist Church. As of March 2001, the RMN encompasses 171 reconciling congregations, 24 reconciling campus ministries, and numerous other reconciling groups. There are thousands and thousands of Reconciling United Methodists who have signed up on record. Contact us at: 3801 N. Keeler Ave., Chicago, IL 60641, phone 773-736-5526, and on web at: <http://www.RMNetwork.org>.
- ▼ Pacific Northwest Reconciling Ministries Network, activist United Methodists in Washington and Northern Idaho including churches, campus ministries and individual Reconciling United Methodists. Meets monthly except summer in various locations. For information: contacts noted below.
- ▼ Parents Reconciling Network, affiliate of Reconciling Ministries Network, unofficial agency within the UMC. Organizing parents in churches and annual conferences, offering materials for individual and church study. Information at: PRN, 3801 N. Keeler Ave., Chicago, IL 60641. Phone 773-736-5526, and on web at <http://www.RMNetwork.org>.
- ▼ PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), non-religious national organization promoting the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning persons, their families and friends, with 450 local chapter support groups nation wide. Excellent resources in print at: PFLAG, 1726 M St. NW, Washington, DC 20036, and on the web at <http://www.pflag.org>. A local support group meets near you.

The PNW Reconciling Ministries Network – Resource Guide Series

is produced by the PNW Reconciling Ministries Network, an unofficial organization of United Methodists within the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference. Items may be ordered from:

PNW RMN, 5701 MacArthur Blvd., Vancouver, WA 98661 • Phone (360) 693-4761.

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When Someone You Know Is Lesbian or Gay They Need a Place in Your Church

Have you discovered that someone you care about, or someone attending your church, may be lesbian or gay, bisexual, or perhaps transgendered? Or maybe they have been questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity. Where can you turn now for information which is both supportive and authentically Christian?

It is important to learn quickly what it means to be homosexual, to use accurate words and terms, and to find answers which are spiritually sound, intellectually accurate, and supportive of those persons.

Not everyone will understand. Even some in your congregation may respond with unkind words or cruel judgment. But since about one in every four or five families in your church includes a gay member, it is time you and other Christians learned more about homosexuality.

Here are basic elements of a Christian approach to persons who may be lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered.

1st – LOVE AS JESUS LOVED

Jesus loved and welcomed all, including those whom his society and even his faith community excluded. He calls us to love all of our neighbors, to welcome them, and to advocate for the neediest and loneliest among us. We can do no other, as faithful followers of Jesus. Some believe the Bible opposes homosexuality, or that lesbians and gay men cannot be Christian, or that the church should exclude them. We believe these are incorrect. But whatever our beliefs, our neighbors need us.

2nd – GIVE YOUR SUPPORT

Whether your friend or loved one is just discovering her or his sexual orientation, or has been “out” for a long time, they have trusted you with a deep truth about themselves. They need your loving support and understanding in their new, more open and honest self-disclosure. Unconditional love is your greatest gift.

3rd – LET THEM LEAD YOU

Letting one’s sexual orientation become known is a deeply personal choice, to be shared only in confidence, and only when one feels truly safe. If someone has shared that with you, it is a gift of incomparable trust. We should never “out” anyone, but keep their truth as a shared confidence until they are ready to reveal it to others. “Coming out” too soon or to the wrong people can lead to betrayal, which can threaten one’s job, endanger a family relationship, or open one to abuse and threats. Let your confidant decide when, where and with whom to share their truth.

4th – LEARN ALL YOU CAN

Seek authoritative materials and learn as much as you are able, as quickly as you can, about gay and lesbian matters. Your choice of sources will be important. Some are extremely negative and false. Those listed in this packet are a good place to start. Write us for a full reading and video list.

5th – BE A FRIEND AND ADVOCATE

There are three great fears for lesbians and gay men when they “come out,” both in the church and elsewhere. 1) Loss of family and friends. 2) Loneliness. 3) Abuse, since even within the congregation some may actively oppose a welcome for gay persons. The greatest gifts anyone can offer gay persons are: to love and accept them; to understand the facts of sexual orientation and gender identity well enough to help inform others; and to take a public stand on their behalf.

6th – HELP THEM FIND SUPPORT

For a lesbian or gay, bisexual or transgendered person, finding a safe and comfortable personal space, and relating happily to other lesbian and gay persons, becomes a primary need. Are there others in your congregation, or in neighboring churches or the community, with whom they can relate comfortably? Consider some options.

- ▼ **The Seattle First Church pastor** recently had two men visit her office. They announced they were gay, long-term partners, in the late stages of AIDS. “We are seeking a church home to nurture our spiritual lives in a congregation where the pastor and congregation will welcome us.” She extended her arms wide and said with a smile, “*You just found it!*”
- ▼ **The Wallingford Church** near Seattle’s University District includes a large percentage of members who are lesbian and gay, with a high comfort level for non-traditional families of all types.
- ▼ **Tacoma First Church** has organized a support group for non-traditional committed couples. Since even half of the marriages end in divorce, non-traditional couples need extra help to nurture and sustain a partnership without the usual social recognition and affirmation. All are welcome in the group, with same-gender couples especially welcomed in the monthly gathering.

What can your congregation offer to lonely and isolated lesbians and gay men? How can you offer a sincere welcome to all people? The Reconciling Ministries Network will be happy to help you explore some good avenues for your congregation and community.

A WORKING VOCABULARY

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people are deeply hurt by namecalling. But like all people, they are also offended by language which reflects ignorance, inaccuracy and misunderstanding. The following word list offers a start in the accurate and proper use of language regarding homosexuality.

- Bisexual** – Sexual, emotional and affection attraction to both one’s own sex and to the opposite sex.
- Choice** – A false assumption that most persons can choose to be straight or gay.
- Coming out** – Sharing one’s sexual orientation with others, an important step in one’s mental and spiritual health.
- Conversion therapy/ Reparative therapy**– An attempt to change a homosexual person to heterosexual by religious conversion or psychological counseling, opposed by the American Psychological Assoc.; potentially harmful.
- Gay** – A homosexual man, or any homosexual.
- Gender identity** – The inner sense of being male or female.
- Heterosexual** – Sexual, emotional and affection attraction to the opposite sex.
- Heterosexism** – the belief in, or commitment to a society which is, or one thinks ought to be, exclusively heterosexual.
- Homosexual** – sexual, emotional and affectional attraction to one’s own sex, also called gay for men and lesbian for women:
- Lesbian** – a homosexual woman.
- l/g/b/t** – Shorthand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered.
- Sexual behavior** – Actions usually but not necessarily expressing one’s sexual orientation.
- Sexual orientation** – Enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectional attraction to another person, ranging along a continuum from exclusive homosexuality to exclusive heterosexuality. Most scientists agree it is the result of complex interaction of environmental, cognitive and biological factors, including inborn genetic and hormonal factors.
- Transgendered** – A person of one sex with an inner sense of being the the opposite sex. Some may change (trans) their gender identity by a change in behavior, name and manner of dressing, and may or may not include surgery.



Parents and Allies of Lesbians and Gays Have Special Needs in Your Congregation

They number more than you might realize. Statistical studies show that between 20% and 25% of all United Methodist families have a lesbian or gay, bisexual or transgendered family member. How many families would that include in your congregation? Quite a lot.

The first United Methodist General Conference in this new century and millennium says this:

“We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.”

—*The Book of Discipline*, ¶161.G

It is time for United Methodist church leaders to help parents, and persons in non-traditional families, to find each other. Often the family with a gay member does not realize there are others in their congregation with lesbian and gay members too. You can help them all to move beyond silence or shame. You can help your entire congregation begin to understand homosexuality, and to welcome the wonderful diversity which exists, but is just out of sight in most churches.

Here are suggested steps, if you are ready to reach out to the families with gay members in your congregation, and to do it in ways that will not violate United Methodist rules. Whether or not you approve of homosexual practice, or have even identified families with gay members, you have an obligation to your congregation to be well informed and understanding, if not sympathetic to their situation. Here’s how.

1. IDENTIFY PARENTS AND FAMILIES OF LESBIANS AND GAYS

We have not found a United Methodist church anywhere without families who have lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered persons within their family circles. Your church included! The first step is to identify families facing issues of sexual orientation or gender identity. Of course, you will keep such names confidential. But as you talk with them, you can share your knowledge of the subject and your understanding of their issues. You can assure them that they and their family members are welcome in your church. Tell them you know of resources which can be helpful for their personal learning and growth.

2. INITIATE CONNECTIONS AMONG FAMILIES

In some congregations, both gays and their families are openly identified and welcomed as full participants. In others, they fear their honesty could open them to criticism, even condemnation. Let each family know they are not alone, that there are other such families in the congregation, and that perhaps they need each other. You might invite two or more such families to a small social evening in the parsonage or one you arrange in a member’s home. Give them a chance to meet, to share personal and family experiences, to feel accompanied on a journey many people might not understand.

3. ENCOURAGE FORMATION OF A SUPPORT GROUP

Wherever possible, we encourage formation of a confidential family support group in every congregation. There are various patterns. At First Church, Bellevue, a few mothers of lesbian and gay children met for many years as a friendly support group for friendship and encouragement. First Church, Tacoma, offers a Committed Partners Support Group, meeting once a month “to nurture and support partnerships without the usual social recognition and affirmations.” Some such groups have only parents, but most include both parents and lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgendered persons as well. Many churches allow the local chapter of PFLAG—Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays—to meet in the building.

4. EQUIP MIND, SPIRIT AND WILL

The first need for families with gay members is to experience love which is both unconditional and Christlike—experience it, then share it with each other.

A close second is their need for the knowledge necessary to understand the nature of homosexuality in a Christian context. Learning new and accurate vocabulary is an important beginning.

A third need, which can only be met in a group, is learning how to tell their stories to others, and to share their interpretations of gay issues as they experience them personally.

Their fourth need is to find ways of helping their congregation in the learning process, with the goal of opening their church to welcome all, beginning with their own family members.

5. OFFER RESOURCES

It is helpful if the pastor, or if parents more experienced with homosexuality, can offer materials for reading and study, as well as sharing their personal experiences. It is good to have a few pieces of literature available, such as the free American Psychological Association pamphlet, or PFLAG's *Your Daughters and Sons*, or a video on hand, like *All God's Children*. For ideas, see our Resource Guide # 4, "Sources for Learning about Lesbian and Gay Persons and Issues." For a more extensive list, see the sources listed in the Resources Guide # 1, and the Reconciling Ministries Network web site at: www.RMNetwork.org. Another type of resource is found in various local, state and national organizations. A United Methodist Parents Reconciling Network is forming in Washington State, and you could form a unit in your church. Other local congregations may have similar groups. The national Reconciling Ministries Network offers an informative and inspirational national meeting every two years. For monthly meetings closer to home, check the Yellow Pages for a local chapter of PFLAG—Parents Families and Friends of Lesbian and Gays—listed in your Yellow Pages.

As a starter, order, or copy and distribute, the brochure for parents, found in this packet, "*Our children are of sacred worth: PARENTS RECONCILING NETWORK.*" It may be copied or ordered from the Chicago address listed on the back. Cost is 6 for \$1.00 plus postage.

6. NURTURE CHRISTIAN GROWTH

As Christians we must grow in grace, or our spiritual life may wither away. Devotional life and worship are vital to our movement. Half a million former United Methodists are lesbians and gays and their families who have already left our churches in disappointment, frustration and anger. What a loss! But a great many of us have chosen to remain and work in the United Methodist Church. We work in Christlike ways to seek justice, while nurturing our spiritual lives. We call the process, *reconciliation*. Until we find a welcome for all Christians within all our congregations, we will continue to share our stories, our struggles and our faith. We hope you will join us.

The other brochure in this packet, "*Add Your Support to our Witness for Diversity,*" may be copied in quantity and distributed in your church or placed in your literature rack.



Including Non-Traditional Families in Leading Worship and Liturgy

If your congregation is typical today, more than half the families will be considered to be “*non-traditional*,” that is, if *traditional* still means a father and a mother and 2.7 children in the home.

Along with your traditional families, chances are you have quite a few widows and widowers living alone, and perhaps some who are living together; some single persons who may be young adults or in their middle or older years; quite a few single mothers with one or more children; and perhaps a single father with a child or two. A few committed couples may be living together unmarried, and may or may not have children in their home.

Some grandparents may be raising their grandchildren in their home. Some women living together, and perhaps some men living together, who may or may not be closeted lesbians or gays. You may also have some couples, male or female, who are openly, even proudly, homosexual. Ethnic and color distinctions are blurring more and more in America, and are beginning to blend in our congregations as well.

All of these have at least one thing in common. They attend your worship services, and perhaps your classes or groups or preschool, in search of a faith-based life, and faith-based relationships with other persons and families.

For them to feel at home, they need to see themselves and their types of families reflected in all aspects of your church’s life, ministry, outreach, and especially your worship services.

There are many settings for including non-traditional family members in your worship, as well as the broader life of your congregation. Here are a few real life examples from our own Pacific Northwest Annual Conference.

- ▼ A Spokane pastor sought to have so-called non-traditional family representatives read the scripture lessons on most Sundays, usually members of color.
- ▼ A Seattle pastor invited a committed couple of gay men, long-term members of the congregation, to light the Advent Wreath and read the appropriate liturgy at a packed Christmas Eve service.
- ▼ A Palouse-area pastor often chose members of the church’s Single Moms group for reading prayers and affirmations of faith.
- ▼ One urban congregation elected a pregnant, openly lesbian woman to head their Education Commission, and often invited her to participate in liturgy.
- ▼ A Central Washington pastor of a largely white congregation began involving the few Latino members or attendees as participants in worship.
- ▼ A Tacoma pastor seems quite intentional in utilizing talented children from families of color, some with single moms, in playing preludes and offertories.

Inclusiveness Is Easy in Worship and Liturgy

There are a great many creative ways to celebrate the diversity of your congregation. Worship and liturgy provide one of the easiest and most visible settings to affirm the complex styles of America's families, and the changing face of United Methodism. Here are a few examples to consider.

- ▼ Making announcements to the congregation
- ▼ Choir membership and solos
- ▼ Playing prelude, offertory, postlude
- ▼ Ushers distributing bulletins and helping with seating
- ▼ Greeters who welcome worshipers and perhaps introduce themselves and others
- ▼ Scripture reading
- ▼ Leading corporate prayers
- ▼ Candle lighting
- ▼ Holiday lighting of Advent Wreath, etc.
- ▼ Serving Holy Communion elements
- ▼ Assisting at Baptisms, weddings and other rites
- ▼ Writing columns in the church newsletter
- ▼ Assisting in church office, answering the phone, etc.
- ▼ Work parties as leaders and participants

It is satisfying and secure when worshipers see others like themselves taking leadership roles in worship and in the life of a congregation. Such intentional inclusion signals that your church is open and welcoming of diversity, a place where everyone is welcome.



Considering Holy Unions for Same-Gender Couples of Your Church

We are called to ministry with all our people. In keeping with our church's official policies, we hope you will take seriously the intentional inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons at all levels within your congregation. Our Book of Discipline is clear in its encouragement. It states:

“We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.” (¶161.G)

For many Christians, the blessing of God and their church on their marriage or holy union is a vital part of their Christian commitment. It is true that *The Discipline* (¶332.6) prohibits United Methodist pastors from officiating at ceremonies uniting same sex couples and from allowing those ceremonies to be conducted within their churches.

However, in facing such a sacred ceremony, no Christian should feel that their church has abandoned them. Family values are as important to lesbian and gay couples as to heterosexuals. Many want their union to be a spiritual experience, their commitment to be blessed by God and by their Christian congregation, and some celebration of it to be held in their own sanctuary. Many pastors and congregations likewise wish to offer encouragement and support for all couples in their congregation who are entering into life-long committed relationships and establishing Christian families.

The Reconciling Ministries Network now has compiled a list of non-United Methodist pastors of other Christian denominations throughout the Pacific Northwest who have already agreed to assist our clergy by officiating at ceremonies of same-gender holy unions. You may ask the PNW RMN office for a contact person who will share such information with you.

There are many ways you and your congregation are able to encourage, support and celebrate holy unions of your members, while not overstepping what our Discipline has prohibited. We offer these suggestions for your consideration.

1. As a function of your pastoral ministry, let the congregation, your wedding hostess, and any lesbian and gay persons, know you are open to talking with them concerning possible holy union ceremonies.
2. If you are comfortable doing so, you may offer to do the pre-union counseling with the couple, just as you would with a heterosexual couple.
3. Let the couple know that you have access to a list of ministers, ordained in other denominations, who will be happy to officiate in the ceremony. We can provide to you a list of such clergy in each of our districts and in most larger communities. In your community, or nearby, you may already know or can locate clergy willing to help. They are most often from the Metropolitan Community Church, United Church of Christ, Unity and the Unitarian-Universalist. Some may be willing who are Presbyterian, Episcopal, Disciples of Christ, and occasionally independent or Baptist.
4. Since your church building is not legally available for the ceremony itself, consider other local settings where such a ceremony may be held. The non-United Methodist clergy person who officiates may be able to provide the church or make other suggestions.

5. If you are willing, plan to take part in the ceremony. There is no disciplinary prohibition to prevent you, as a United Methodist pastor, from sharing in the ceremony, since you are not officiating. Prayer, homily, serving Holy Communion are just a few possible roles.
6. If you are willing to do so, let the congregation be involved in the joyous anticipation and planning, just as your members might in a heterosexual marriage.
7. The setting of the Holy Union ceremony is important. One church has constructed a special movable archway, designed as the symbol of their sanctuary. Another has designed a movable background flat as a reminder of their sanctuary chancel. Each can be moved to the site of the ceremony to show the congregation's support of their member couple.
8. Your sanctuary is a sacred and an appropriate setting for your members, a proper place for them to celebrate their Christian commitment, even though the Holy Union itself may not be held there. A worship service to remember and celebrate the covenant with joyful thanks to God is fully appropriate in your sanctuary, and proper for a United Methodist pastor to lead.
9. A reception, following either the Holy Union ceremony or a worship service, may be held in your church.
10. If you or the couple wish it, we can provide a list of resources for alternate ceremonies designed especially for same-gender Holy Unions. Also, see the listing of sources in our Resource Guide #1.

Please get in touch with us if you have comments, questions, or if we may help in any way. Contact information is listed below.



Understanding Homosexuality as Christians and Scholars*

Our organization, the Pacific Northwest Reconciling Ministries Network, is inclusive of heterosexual and homosexual United Methodists. Our cause is justice for all. However we also seek to advance interaction with those whose understanding differs from ours, and who may support the General Conference condemnation of homosexual practice as unchristian. We foster dialogue while striving to be clear and concise in defining the errors we see in the General Conference position.

The General Conference has declared: “(W)e do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching” (&161.G). We do not agree. Many United Methodists ask: How can they claim that homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian teaching? Do any actual teachings either confirm or deny that claim? More to the point, since we believe that homosexuality and Christian teaching are actually compatible, what reputable teachings can we point to which show their compatibility? How can we open dialogue?

We reject any limitation of membership rights unique to homosexual persons, and affirm the recognition and acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered persons, and of their/our personal and corporate commitments, as legitimate and welcome within The United Methodist Church, as well as society as a whole.¹ However, it is important that we all acknowledge that varieties of belief regarding homosexuality coexist within our church. In a large denomination with traditions like ours, that is both inevitable and fitting. Our critique of the General Conference legislation rests in part upon our own understanding of the nature of homosexuality. We seek to correct nine misconceptions and to interpret our beliefs.

NINE MISCONCEPTIONS

1. Some devoted Christians claim to be bound by every directive in the Bible, and therefore truly believe that the Bible condemns homosexuality as a sin for us today. We respectfully disagree. Jesus never mentioned homosexuality. In any case, as New Testament Scholar Walter Wink points out, “Many of the practices that the Bible prohibits, we allow, and many that it allows, we prohibit... Christians reserve the right to pick and choose which (biblical) sexual mores they will observe, though they seldom admit doing just that. And this is as true of evangelicals and fundamentalists as it is of liberals and mainliners.”² Wink concludes, “Our moral task...is to apply Jesus’ love ethic to whatever sexual mores are prevalent in a given culture,...(and) to be critiqued by Jesus’ love commandment.” Other New Testament scholars agree.³

2. Prior to the 1880s, it was generally believed that all people were heterosexual by nature,⁴ and any homoerotic behavior was seen as aberrant and deliberately immoral. Today most authorities on human behavior⁵ and on morality⁶ understand same-gender attraction to be one variety of human love, fully as natural and potentially as moral as heterosexual attraction and behavior. We believe The United Methodist Church must, and eventually will, join other Christians in understanding God’s creation in this way.

3. Some Christians continue to claim that homosexuality is a personal choice, and thus that homosexuality itself is a sinfully rebellious personal decision. We disagree. In concert with most scientific consensus today, we understand homosexuality most often, although not always, to be an innate state of sexual orientation.⁷ It is no more often a choice than heterosexuality is a choice for the vast majority of heterosexuals.

4. Some well-meaning but misguided Christians point to a discredited method called “Conversion Therapy” or “Reparative Therapy,” which they claim can change any l/g/b/t/q persons into heterosexuals. Certainly those whom *The Discipline* calls “former homosexuals,” who try to change their behavior, should not experience “coercion and marginalization” (&162.H). While no long-term studies have been conducted, some advocates do appear successful in altering their sexual behavior. But only a tiny portion of gay men or lesbians are willing to attempt such a change, even temporarily. For most who try, the method is ultimately unsuccessful; for many, it

proves disastrously destructive.⁸ Since homosexuality is neither an illness nor an abnormality, but usually an innate condition, even the Roman Catholic Church has acknowledged it is not amenable to change.⁹ Thus persons can neither be taught nor recruited to be homosexual, any more than persons can be taught or recruited to be lefthanded.

5. Some believe it is only the expression of homosexual intimacy that is sinful. They condemn it, not only for “single” persons, but even within a monogamous lifetime commitment by Christians. Again, we respectfully disagree. We believe that one’s sexual orientation is morally neutral,¹⁰ whether heterosexual or homosexual, in the words of the Social Principles, “*God’s good gift*,” which can be expressed in ways that may be either mutually fulfilling or destructive.

6. Traditional Christian disciplinarians tend to restrict all sexual activity to monogamous marriage of a man and a woman. This puts homosexual Christians in a double bind. They are prevented from marrying, then accused of promiscuity, and even blamed as a menace to “traditional family values.” It seems to be the culture’s emphasis on the freedom of sexual pleasure for its own sake that is destabilizing family values. But most data point to heterosexual, not homosexual, behavior as the critical factor.¹¹

7. We believe that all Christians should be held to similar moral and ethical standards. But like our society, the General Conference has established a double standard—one for heterosexual couples, and a very different one for homosexuals. This is both unreasonable and unjust. We believe with Charles Hefling, that “same-sex relationships (hold) the same potential for sacramental meaning and power” as heterosexual relationships.¹² As long as two homosexual persons are prohibited from marriage, their fidelity within a committed relationship should be welcomed and blessed by the church as positively as heterosexual fidelity within marriage.

8. We also recognize that there may always be some Christians who believe sincerely that homosexuality is sinful, and hold that their position is non-negotiable. That is their privilege, just as it is ours to come to a different conclusion. But United Methodists have a tradition of inclusiveness. We have the ability to disagree peaceably and lovingly on many issues.¹³ We believe that all of us can and should make our home in the same church, and that the conviction of one portion of our faith community should not be codified into a church law that discriminates against another equally committed portion.

9. It is often pointed out that our denomination might at first pay some price in loss of membership and income by welcoming l/g/b/t/q persons as full equals. We must point out that the church has experienced a tremendous, though largely silent and unacknowledged, loss of participation and donations of members who are themselves l/g/b/t/q, plus the loss of many of their families and advocates as well. The General Conference has clearly chosen which members it prefers to lose—a choice we believe is based on personal sentiment, political expediency and institutional protectionism, rather than theological reasoning and faithfulness to the gospel.

As United Methodists, we must be able and willing to study these topics together and dialogue about them.

†This document is an excerpt from To Plead the Cause, a theological study paper of the PNW RMN, included in this packet. Footnotes referenced above will be found in that paper. To Plead the Cause may be downloaded free with or without Adobe Acrobat Reader from the web site: <http://www.RMNetwork.org/other/toplead.html>. Printed copies are also available for \$3 each, and full sets of Resource Guides for \$5 per set, from the address below.



Suggestions for a Five-Session Class

“To Plead the Cause” STUDY GUIDE

PREPARATION – To meet the needs of various time frames, this Study Plan can expand into 10 or 12 sessions, or the material can be condensed into two or three sessions. Each class member will need a copy of the booklet, “To Plead the Cause: Reconciling Ministries and United Methodism.” The printed 32 page booklet can be ordered, or it may be downloaded free and copied. For instructions see the note at the end of this piece. It will be helpful, although certainly not necessary, if class members have the opportunity to read the entire study, including footnotes, prior to the first class. The class facilitator might well gather books, pamphlets and articles on related topics, and seek to borrow several copies of *The Book of Discipline* for class use.

SESSION I. Church and Homosexuality in a Changing Society

A. Let’s begin at the end. Read and discuss the Conclusion of “To Plead the Cause.”

1. Do you see indications that the United States is in the midst of a “discomforting social transition” regarding homosexuality, as Stephanie Coontz suggests? She lists these three periods: a) individual and family stress, b) public debate, c) restabilization.
2. In which of the three stages do you see the mainstream U. S. culture? In which is the United Methodist Church nationally? In which is your local church? In which are you?
3. How can theology undergird (support) social change, as Eileen Lindner suggests?
4. How is or is not, theology already undergirding social/cultural change around homosexuality?
5. What makes homosexuality a difficult issue for discussion in the church and among Christians?
6. How might a study like this one help or hinder this social and cultural transition?

B. Read and discuss the Prologue and Section I, through “Contemporary Division.”

1. Look up the Bible references: Acts 8:26-40 and Acts 10:9-16.
2. What similarities do you see between the New Testament Church’s conflict over circumcision and our current conflict over homosexuality?
3. What other differences or conflicts are you aware of in this local congregation, especially conflicts between stated religious beliefs and actual personal behavior? What conflicts in United Methodism nationally? Are they being addressed? How?

C. For next week: (Class facilitator: you may wish to make this a handout.)

1. Read all of Section I, Our Need for Reconciliation, including the footnotes.
2. Try to find any books listed in the footnotes, or other books or articles on similar subjects. Read appropriate chapters and bring them to share at the next session. Note what they add to your understanding of this issue and how they challenge your perspective.
3. Be ready to make a 1 minute report on your outside reading and reflections.
4. Locate and talk with (interview) three lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered persons, at least one in this congregation, and at least one in no religious group. Ask: a) What do you believe the public misunderstands about homosexuality? b) What do you believe many churches misunderstand about homosexuality? c) What keeps you in or out of a church?

SESSION II. Reconciliation with Homosexual Christians

A. Hear reports assigned at the previous session. Did anyone find any books or other resources? What did they add to your understanding of this issue? Did they challenge your thinking in any way? What questions did they raise, what emotions did they stir in you?

B. Discuss Section I. Our Need for Reconciliation—Details which Divide. Here are the Study's nine misconceptions, listed as discussion questions.

1. Does the Bible condemn homosexuality? 2. Is homosexuality a choice? 3. Can homosexuality be changed by religious conversion or therapy? 4. Is the expression of homosexual intimacy sinful? 5. Are sexual acts only acceptable within marriage? Only between a married man and woman? 6. Is homosexuality a threat to marriage and family values? 7. Are homosexual life-partner commitments different from those of heterosexuals? 8. Should one's Christian belief remain permanent and unchangeable? 9. Will this congregation and the denomination lose members and income if homosexual Christians are welcomed?

For each misconception listed:

- a. Do you agree that this is a misconception?
- b. Has your awareness and understanding of homosexuality changed regarding this point?
- c. If so, what influenced that change?

C. For next week:

1. Talk with the pastor and a lay officer about whom they believe may feel included or excluded from your congregation.
 2. Read next week's passages from *The Book of Discipline*. How do you agree or disagree with each? (*Class facilitator may need to create a handout of this. Some are also available at the United Methodist Church website, <http://www.umc.org>.)*
- ¶ 4, Constitution Article IV, Inclusiveness of the Church, pg. 22.
 - ¶104 Our Theological Task, pp. 74-86.
 - ¶161 Social Principles. A. The Family, p. 99; C. Marriage, p. 99; G. Human Sexuality pp. 100-101;
 - ¶162 The Social Community, first paragraph, p. 104; H. Equal Rights Regardless of Sexual Orientation, p.107.
 - ¶202 Function of the Local Church, pp. 123-124
 - ¶332 Unauthorized Conduct, 6. "Ceremonies that celebrate...etc.," p. 220.
 - ¶806.9. "It shall be responsible... etc.," p. 453.

SESSION III. Inclusion and Exclusion in the Church

A. Discuss the assignment for last session. What did you learn from discussions with a pastor or lay leader? Did you personally ever feel included or excluded from any church? What helped or hindered those feelings? What surprised you about what you learned or experienced? Share your personal knowledge of persons who have been excluded, or felt that they were

B. Explain the United Methodist General Conference: how members are elected, how it works, how it votes, how The Discipline is written and changed. (*Class facilitator may wish to invite a pastor, or Annual Conference lay delegate, or new member orientation teacher, for this segment.*)

C. Read and discuss each of the Paragraphs from *The Book of Discipline*. For each reference, ask:

1. What does this reference say or imply about who is included and who is excluded, including lesbian and gay persons?
2. In what instances are these passages consistent or inconsistent with the rest of *The Discipline*?
3. How do you feel about these references, and about the inclusion of some persons in the community of faith, and the exclusion of some persons from it?

D. For next week:

1. Read Part II. Our Foundation Documents.
2. Ask for volunteers to research and bring brief reports to the next class on each of the following.
 - a) The times in which John Wesley lived—18th Century England;
 - b) A brief biography of John Wesley;

- c) Wesley's ministry: his preaching, sermons, journal and other writings.
- d) The meanings of: creation, reconciliation, redemption
- e) The meanings of: heresy, sin, apostasy

(Facilitator: Suggest resources including *The Discipline*, church library, pastor's library, encyclopedias, public library and Internet. See also Resource Guide #1 for more references.)

SESSION IV. Exploring theology: Creation, Reconciliation, Redemption

A. Hear and discuss briefly the reports assigned at the previous session.

B. Read and discuss Part II, Our Foundation Documents.

First Part

1. There are important words we seldom use in daily life. Discuss the simplest meaning of each as you might use it, then look up the formal definition.
 - a) creation, b) re-creation, c) sacred worth, d) condone, e) Christian teaching, f) incompatible, g) self-avowed, h) practicing homosexual, i) heresy,
2. What do you think Wesley meant, "To be ignorant of many things, and to mistake in some, is the necessary condition of humanity"?
3. Why do you think the Study claims that "the General Conference has violated its own historic statements of faith"?

Second Part

1. Discuss both the simplest meaning and the formal meaning of:
 - a) reconciliation, b) the human ministry of the church, c) sin, d) means of grace, e) repent
2. What might Wesley have meant, "My belief is no rule for another"?
3. What does *The Discipline* mean by "Distinctive Wesleyan Emphasis" (§101)?
4. What inconsistencies do you see in the acceptance and rejection implied in the last paragraph of *The Discipline*, §161.G, p. 101? It begins, "Homosexual persons no less than...."
5. Why would Wesley defend a man in prison for sodomy? See footnote 14. Would you?
6. How can the Study claim that a pastor is forced into disobedience to *The Discipline* by either conducting or not conducting a holy union for a member?

Third Part

1. Discuss the simplest meaning and the formal meaning of:
 - a) redemption, b) divine initiative, c) ensnared in evil, d) apostasy, e) inclusive worshipping community, f) holy union/same-gender union
2. On what does Jesus say "hang all the law and the prophets"? What does that mean for us?
3. What do you think Wesley means by "a catholic spirit"? Does our church have it? Do we?
4. Why does the Study claim the General Conference has capitulated to, and become a participant in, the evils of anti-homosexual rhetoric and actions? Do you agree? What might this mean in our personal lives? In our congregation? In our denomination?
5. What do you think the Study means by "faithful obedience to the gospel of Jesus"? To what extent are you, are we, faithfully obedient?
6. What option does a Christian have when our understanding of obedience to God and our obedience to church law are in conflict?

C. For next week

Reread the Conclusion of "To Plead the Cause." What new information and what shifts in attitudes have you experienced as a result of this study? What questions remain unanswered for you? What struggles are unresolved for you? What new actions might we consider?

SESSION V. Plans for Further Learning and Action. What might we do? What will we do?

A. Share responses from the previous session's assignments regarding information, attitudes, remaining questions, and ideas for actions.

B. Review again and summarize the following:

1. Each of the nine misconceptions about homosexuality in Part I, Our Need for Reconciliation. Share ideas and feelings. How can reconciliation begin among those who disagree?
2. The three foundation doctrines: Creation, Reconciliation, Redemption, and their meaning for homosexuality and faithful Christianity in your church.
3. The Conclusion section. Invite participants to share responses, learning, questions.

C. Discuss the following questions:

1. Do you agree with the Study that perhaps a majority of Christians feel caught in the middle of the disagreement over homosexuality in the church? Why?
2. Do you think it is appropriate for a faithful United Methodist to seek to change church law? Why or why not? If so, how? In our local church? In the General Conference?
3. Are Christians ever justified in openly disobeying a church law, or a civil law? When? Why? See *The Discipline*, ¶164.E on civil obedience and disobedience.
4. Do homosexual persons feel welcome and accepted in your congregation? How can you tell?
5. Is it more important that we be peacemakers or justice seekers in our church? Can we be both?

D. What will be our next steps?

1. Encourage the group to outline and write a possible article for your church newsletter, explaining what they learned and any response they hope from their congregation.
2. How can we encourage more “theological discourse” on these issues, including more persons within and beyond our congregation?
3. Does your congregation appear to welcome and accept homosexual persons? What specific things could be done to indicate such a welcome? See Resource Guide “Including Non-traditional Families.”
4. Do homosexual persons actually feel welcome in your congregation? How can you tell?
5. What lesbian and gay sponsored events occur in your community? Find out and consider support and participation. Examples: PFLAG, GLSEN, Gay Pride March, Coming Out Day, a high school Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) student organization.
6. Encourage the group to write a petition to General Conference seeking to change its legislation and welcome homosexual persons at all levels of church life.
7. Help the group write a responsive reading, perhaps using words from Jesus, Wesley and *The Discipline*, as found in the Study.
8. Help individuals or the group together to write a prayer for the resolution of this conflict in our churches and our society. Ask the pastor to consider using it in a worship service.

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