



Do I have to have a 'liberal' theology to affirm gay people?

There are those with conservative viewpoints who also love and affirm their lesbian, gay relatives and friends.

What about same sex marriage?

Lesbian or gay relationships can be long-term committed, faithful and loving, as much as heterosexual relationships. The celebration of relationships contributes to the wellbeing of individuals, their families, friends and the community, for same sex couples as it does for heterosexual couples. Not everyone wants marriage, but it should be available to those who do.

Disallowing marriage is not new. At times it has been denied to divorcees, between different races, different denominations. The intention and ability to procreate has never been a prerequisite for marriage.

Eugene F. Rogers Jr., author of *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God* and *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings* suggests "To not celebrate [the relationship] may even be resisting the Spirit, to attempt to deprive same-sex couples of the discipline of marriage The danger of refusing to celebrate love is real".

But what if it's my child?

No matter how open minded you are, it can be a shock if it's your own child. Parents can face the same bewildering and agonising journey of 'what does it all mean', 'coming out' as a parent of a gay child, and potential ostracism.

Where *is* the church when it is needed?

What about 1 Corinthians 5?

Do not "associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an

idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber-not even to eat with such a one" (1 Cor 5:11).

The Apostle Paul advocated ejecting a sinner from the fellowship to "deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved" and to keep the eucharistic fellowship 'pure' (1 Cor 5:5-8).

Outrageous? Would Jesus do this? Some people today are 'faithful' to these verses by thinking they need to exclude some people from their midst. At the time, Paul was building the church from scratch so hard-hitting devices may have been necessary. Do they translate to today, or like some other verses, are they meant for their own time and circumstance?

What are the social effects?

Of youth in secondary schools who are attracted to others of the same sex, 46% have been verbally abused, and 13% physically abused. (Hillier, et al, *Writing Themselves In: A National Report on the Sexuality, Health and Well-Being of Same-Sex Attracted Young People*. La Trobe University, 1998.)

Ministries to the homeless report that a large number of young men living on the streets are gay, having been thrown out of home with nowhere else to go. Other studies show a high rate of suicide among young gay males particularly in country areas. In fact, every lesbian or gay person, of any age, has a story to tell.

It's not fun to live in fear of losing the love of family and church community and even to be told that God hates you.

The time has come to challenge the hostilities & fears associated with a more traditional theological view. By the grace of God, we are all people of the Vine (Jn 15). The one true question remains: 'What would Jesus do?'

Prepared by Elizabeth Teece for the Uniting Network NSW/ACT to address some of the questions, which confront church members.

"A place at the table..." Luke 13:29

The Church and Homosexuality Questions: You Decide



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UN NSW/ACT links to the Uniting Church in Australia through the NSW Board of Education



What does Uniting Network want?

The Uniting Network's vision is that the Uniting Church be a safe place where lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people, their families and friends are affirmed, their gifts used at all levels, their loving relationships valued and their faith nurtured.

Is homosexuality a sin?

Some Christians say yes. Five verses from the Old and New Testaments have been used as 'evidence' that homosexuality is a sin. However, some verses also support slavery and inequality for women.

Biblical writers understood homosexual behaviour as a manifestation of sin¹. Homosexuality came to be understood as an inherent orientation only during the 19th Century.

Jesus was silent on the subject. He took issue mostly with Pharisees, those who imposed the law regardless of its effect on people. He befriended the outcast.

Is homosexuality a sickness?

In 1973 the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists deleted homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. Despite this, some practitioners still practice aversion therapy.

Studies show that social rejection and discrimination increase the risk of self-hatred, depression, drug and alcohol misuse, risky social and sexual behaviour and suicide.

How common is it?

In a recent study, between 9 and 11% of secondary

¹ Refer to Bill Loader, Uniting Church Minister and Professor of New Testament at Murdoch University in Western Australia <http://www.staff.murdoch.edu.au/~%7E/loader/homosexuality.html>

students indicated they were not exclusively attracted to the opposite sex. (Lindsay, et al, *Secondary students, HIV/AIDS and sexual health*, La Trobe University, 1997)

In every age, respected members of the community across all areas of life have been lesbian or gay, some being deeply committed Christians.

If we accept homosexuals, does that mean 'anything goes'?

The church plays an important role in upholding moral values, contributing to social cohesion for the common good. With this role comes the serious responsibility to 'get it right' and the humility to know that the church hasn't always done so. In the past, scripture has been used to justify apartheid, slavery and the oppression of women. It's hard to imagine just how normal slavery was not so long ago.

No, not anything goes. Activities that violate others, such as the exploitation of minors, rape, and abuse of any kind, should never be tolerated.

Can't gays just be celibate?

If gays or lesbians were celibate, whose common good would that serve, unless it has been given as a gift to individuals by God for a lifetime of service?

God made them male & female.

In an unimaginably complex & multi-textured creation, is our human emotional identity black and white?

What about 'ex-gay' ministries?

Two founders of Exodus International, a church-based coalition of ministries that purports to change homosexual sexual orientation to 'ex-gay', tell their stories.

For four years 'ex-gay' Michael Bussee and Garry Cooper along with other staffers travelled across the USA, speaking to church groups and recruiting local parishes into the 'ex-gay' ministries. Over the years they noticed that "none of the hundreds of (mostly) men they counseled actually changed their sexual orientation. The majority... at most managed to be celibate". The sexual orientation of Bussee and Cooper themselves, despite years in the program, had not changed. They eventually left the church and came out as a gay couple. (O'Neill, C., *Founders of Ex-Gay Ministries Come Out*, Integrity News and Notes, 1990)

If my congregation were open and affirming, would it be overrun with homosexuals?

The surprise is that any self-respecting lesbian or gay person wants anything to do with the institutional church. It is more likely that a long-standing member would feel safe enough to 'come out' in your faith community than a new person come in the door.

Like many in the broader community, LGBT people seek a church with a spiritually enriching and relevant message. Supportive congregations do manage to attract a minority of lesbian and gay people into their midst. Interestingly, many people later are elected by the congregation to various ministries.

What about 'Family Values'?

Some use 'Family Values' as shorthand for anti-gay sentiments. What about 'Valuing Families'? Is it not more Christ-like to value people and families rather than valuing 'values'? What family does not have some immediate or extended family member, friend or workmate who is lesbian or gay?

Pressure to reject a daughter or son has devastating effects on the family.

