
CONGREGATIONAL IDENTITY, GENDER,



THE BLACK
CHURCH CENTER
FOR JUSTICE AND EQUITY

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Disclaimer: This guide is designed to provide educational information to clergy and faith leaders on the topics discussed. It is not meant as a substitute to any psychological, legal, or other type of professional advice. Literary resources are provided for informational purposes only and do not constitute endorsement of this guide.

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President's Statement



The mission the Black Church Center for Justice & Equality (BCC) is to create an organization dedicated to reaffirming the social justice tradition of the Black Church, amplifying the Black Church's role in American public life, and engaging struggles for justice. The new century has brought with it monumental shifts in public consciousness—around identity, gender, and sexuality, and around the ways we embrace family and communities whose configurations and identities do not conform to established ideologies. We are, in many ways, more open-minded, accepting, and understanding than

we have been. But black churches still have a way to go towards realizing the dream of building an affirming, inclusive community, one where all members of the human family are treated with love and acceptance, notwithstanding our various doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and theological differences.

A fundamental value of the BCC is the EQUALITY of all human beings. We affirm the conclusions of Scripture, that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, and we are all one (Galatians 3:28).” We believe that all people, regardless of race, gender, sexual identity, religion, creed, country of origin, or physical or mental ability, are entitled to equal treatment not just under the law, but also in our religious communities.

We hope this guide is a helpful and informative resource in your journey to offer safe, inclusive, affirming, and holistic ministry to all members of the body of Christ. We pray that it is a blessing to you as you endeavor to be a blessing to those whom God has called you to minister.

Be Blessed,

Rev. Dr. Delman L. Coates
President, The Black Church Center for Justice & Equality

Preface

Within our faith community we interact with diverse people, personalities, situations, and challenges that require us to step outside our comfort zones. Whether one grew up in a conservative environment, liberal environment, or somewhere in between, he or she must wrestle with uncomfortable topics and situations.

For example, 60-years-ago gender was thought of as a binary concept: a man is a man and a woman is a woman. However, we now understand that gender is a spectrum of self-expression and personal preferences including, but not limited to, those who identify as male OR female, those who identify as male AND female, and those who identify as neither male NOR female. It is important to become culturally competent in 21st century issues in order to help others grow closer to Christ and not further away.

This guide is designed to educate Christian communities of faith seeking to understand and tackle a range of issues relating to identity, gender, and sexuality. It will help clergy and congregations from both affirming, and non-affirming denominations, to facilitate healthy dialogues among those of varying backgrounds in the Black church. To see the world as Christ sees the world, we must use EVERY fruit of the spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) to help understand and embrace the rich diversity of God's creation.

The topic of gender and sexuality is broad. This guide is not exhaustive. It is intended to introduce and facilitate further discussion in your community. It will address issues of identity in the realm of gender, gender nonconformity, sexual identity, and marriage equality, among other important topics. Attached to this handbook is also a glossary of terms, contact information for national organizations focused on advancing LGBTQIA

(lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual) rights and faith communities offering ministry to LGBTQIA identifying individuals, as well as other resources to assist faith communities in understanding and communicating with members.

One goal of this guide is to revitalize the Black Church in changing the world by reframing and reshaping the narrative that is often told about the Black Church's stance on issues of identity, gender, and sexuality. If you are interested in broadening your vision, growing to new spiritual heights, and reaching underserved members, this guide will assist as a starting point in a journey to offering a safe, inclusive, and affirming spiritual environment.

What Is Identity?

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them – Genesis 1: 27

When asked “Who are you?,” you might consider a number of personal characteristics: internal traits (e.g., personality or mental abilities), external features (e.g., height or style), culture (e.g., ethnicity or religion), societal positioning (e.g., job status or political affiliations), sexual identity (e.g., heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual), age (e.g., adolescent, young adult, or senior citizen), or even one’s role as it relates to others (e.g., husband/wife or mom/dad). For some, this classification is a simple exercise; others may struggle to clearly define certain aspects of their identity. The concept of identity has always been complex and is often guided not just by knowledge, but also by sociocultural attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

Interpersonal and Mediated Interactions

Daily interactions, both positive and negative, shape how one views oneself and how one views other people. Self-concept (self-image, self-esteem, and self-efficacy) is directly tied to personal experiences. On a micro level, a person’s individual identity is constantly shifting in response to external factors, altered by social comparison, self-categorization, societal ideals, and the perceptions of others. On a macro level, people are often identified and judged based on group affiliations. Think about which groups of people are often recognized as excelling in basketball or math, or which groups are most likely to be labeled a terrorist or an undocumented worker. Sexism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, and classism perpetuate, both consciously and unconsciously, mindsets that

have led to discrimination based on societal labels. The Civil Rights, Feminist, and Gay Liberation Movements have all sought to change the way certain groups are viewed, and treated, in society.

Media also serves as a medium for identity construction and identity politics. It can provide an avenue for countercultural discourse or perpetuate established norms and ideologies. In music, for example, male rapper Young Thug challenged the definition of masculinity in rap culture by wearing a ruffle dress on the cover of his album "*Jeffery*." He has argued that he can be "gangsta" in either a dress or baggy pants and that there is no such thing as gender.[1] By contrast, a lot of television programming perpetuates established or even outdated norms of gender, norms that may not accurately represent real-life experiences of gender and sexuality. For example, Miller Lite's "*Man Up*" commercials reinforce masculinity by telling men not to "act like a girl." Whether interpersonal and media interactions leave one with accurate or inaccurate views of gender and sexuality, the church must be aware of these influences in order to respond, and if necessary, counterbalance notions that may be misinformed or misguided.

Religion

One's religion also plays a role in identity formation. The Pew Research Center found that those who were raised within a single religious identity (particularly Protestant) and grew up with parents who frequently discussed religion were more likely to adopt the same religion into adulthood.[2] Psychological stability is promoted by a sense of predictability, belongness, and self-actualization, and religion can provide these through its moralities, rituals, traditions, institutions, and community. Scriptural interpretation informs our understanding of what it means to be a believer in Christ—for both ourselves and others.

Those who believe in and receive God are *His* children (John 1:12), created in *His* image (Genesis 1:27). They have been set apart as chosen people, a royal priesthood, a Holy nation, and God's special possession (Jeremiah 1:5; 1 Peter 2:9). These guiding principles establish that each member of a faith community is unique and acceptable in God's sight.

While religion is meant to provide positive self-affirmation for its adherents, it has also caused some to question their self-identity and whether they are truly welcome in the church. Unfortunately, this perceived disconnect between one's self-identity and the church identity has led many believers to abandon the church and seek acceptance in non-religious institutions. The church needs to be a place of refuge and hope, not judgment and castigation. If we want to revitalize the church, we must deepen and broaden our understanding of the mandate of Christ.

Sex and Gender

Historically, the terms "sex" and "gender" have been used interchangeably; contemporarily, their meanings are becoming increasingly distinct. Those whose sex and gender align may not understand the necessity of differentiating between the two. However, sex and gender do not always align. Those with non-binary gender and sex identifications understand the difficulty of oversimplified categories. Understanding the differences between the two concepts is important to discussions regarding the question of identity.

In general terms, "**sex**" refers to the biological differences between males and females, such as one's genetics. Biological sex includes those who are cis-sexual, trans-sexual, and intersexual. **Cissexual** is a term assigned to individuals who choose to keep the

binary sex of male or female assigned to them at birth. They do not undergo any physical, surgical, or legal changes to their sex. In comparison, **transsexual** individuals change the sex they were assigned at birth. For example, a male who would like to become a female may take hormones or undergo a sex-change operation in order to become female. Transitioning from one sex to the other is a difficult process that involves surgical, medicinal, and legal components. **Intersex** individuals do not fit into the binary categorizations of male or female, but instead have non-distinct sex organs, chromosomes, and/or elevated hormone levels that are present at birth or develop later in life. They are not biologically cissexual; however, they do not necessarily seek to alter their biological sex.

"**Gender**" is more difficult to define but can refer to the role of a male or female in society (gender role), or an individual's concept of themselves (gender identity). While sex is biological, gender is sociological. Gender identity construction begins at an early age with gender normalization. Children are often taught to play with "gender-appropriate" toys, wear "gender-appropriate" colors, and believe gendered ideologies that align with what is culturally acceptable. This acculturation positively and negatively shapes a child's outlook on the world, and continues into adulthood. Gender forms include: cisgender, transgender, and genderqueer. A **cisgender** individual is a person whose personal identity and gender corresponds with his or her biological sex at birth. An individual who is born female and identifies as a woman would be known as cis-gendered. Cisgendered individuals do not have to "come out" as being cisgendered because this identity is gender normative, or aligns with traditional gender roles.

Sometimes, one does not identify with the social terms imposed on them by society.

Transgender, or trans, people have a gender identity that differs from their biological sex.

For example, someone may be born a female, identify as a man, and choose to adopt socially constructed cultural standards of masculinity such as wearing tuxedos and ties, “being” aggressive, or taking the dominant role in a relationship. For some in the trans community, something as simple as their birth name may cause anxiety, as it is a reminder of the gender with which they do not identify. It is important to keep in mind “transgender” does not mean one is attempting to change one’s biological sex.

Those who are **genderqueer** do not identify with any one gender, but may consider themselves as neither male/female, both male/female, or a combination of both. For example, a man who likes to wear baggy pants, tuxedos, and lipstick or nail polish, may be considered genderqueer. To him, he is not a representation of sole masculinity or femininity; some days he may be more “masculine” or some days he may be more “feminine.” Some days he may represent both, and some days he may represent neither. He chooses what to represent, independent from the gender roles and expectations society has prescribed.

Sexual Identity

An additional component of identity is understanding **sexual identity** which describes who one is romantically emotionally, and sexually attracted to; this may or may not align with sex and gender. Sexual identity includes, but is not limited to, those who identify as **heterosexual**, **homosexual**, **bisexual**, or **pansexual**. Those who identify as heterosexual, also known as “straight,” are attracted to people of the opposite sex (e.g. male attracted to female). Those who identify as homosexual, also known as “gay” or

“lesbian” are attracted to people of the same sex (e.g. female attracted to female). Those who identify as bisexual are attracted to both sexes (e.g. male attracted to male and female) and those who are pansexual do not limit their attraction by sex or gender (e.g. a male attracted to a transsexual, male, and/or female). A 2015 CDC study reported that 97.6% of U.S. adults over 18 openly identified as heterosexual, 1.6% identified as homosexual, and 0.8% identified as bisexual. [3] The study of pansexuality is still in development.

There are three approaches to thinking about sexual identity: Essentialism, Social Constructionism, and Interactionism.[4] Essentialism states that biology determines sexual identity. Researchers study the brain, endocrine system, and genetics to better understand one’s orientation. Social Constructionism argues that sexual identity is cultivated in society and influenced by social and linguistic inputs. Lastly, Interactionism, not a true merger of the two approaches, states that biological and social influences may both be used to better understand sexual identity. Understanding these approaches helps to shape informed and nuanced religious discourse in these areas because it allows one to see how multifaceted the issues of sex and gender are.

An Evolving Demographic

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. – John 10:16

In the United States, heterosexuality has been the dominant sexual identity. As previously stated, those reported to be heterosexual comprise 97.6% of the U.S. population.[5] Heteronormativity is a system that regularizes behaviors and expectations based on heterosexuality and the presumption that gender is only binary (male and female). This outlook is reinforced through laws and practices that assume and promote heterosexual gender roles and expectations. When one is heterosexual, his or her sexual identity is not an impediment to engaging in core activities of personal and civic expression, including: marriage, filing joint taxes, adopting, or showing public displays of affection. Heterosexuals do not struggle to choose which dressing room or bathroom to enter, or how to identify themselves on official documents and or applications.

Heteronormativity can obscure the fact that there are barriers to many services for those who do not identify as heterosexual. For example, same-sex couples can be denied fertility treatments because they do not fit the criteria of some insurance companies for what it means to be infertile, and although laws are in place to protect different-sex couples from housing discrimination, same-sex couples may be denied housing because of their sexual preferences. Many states still do not bar employment discrimination based on sexual identity or gender identity. Yet heteronormativity is often invisible and goes largely unexamined unless it is challenged. As these challenges become more common and differences more recognized, what is considered the “norm” is being reconfigured.

Millennials have seen the greatest shift in perceptions of gender and sexuality. A 2015 Millennial poll of 18-34 year olds found that 57% of those polled believed gender exists on a spectrum.[6] A Gallup poll reported that while the adult LGBTQIA population (defined as those born before 1980) increased from 3.5% in 2012 to 4.1% in 2016, the millennial LGBTQIA population (defined as those born between 1980-1998) has increased from 5.8% in 2012 to 7.3% in 2016.[7] Unlike previous generations, Millennials were exposed to the Internet at an early age and also exposed to more diverse life stories, allowing them to be more open to lifestyles different from their own.[8]

It is important to note that cultural norms have always been in a state of flux. In the 1880s, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was photographed in a dress at the age of two. At this time, dresses for young children were gender-neutral. Boys wore dresses until the age of 6 or 7 when they received their first haircut. Until the late 1920s pink was considered to be a “boy” color and blue a “girl” color (in 1927, *Time* magazine printed a chart of what colors were appropriate for girls and boys),[9] high heels were originally created for men; secretaries and teachers were once predominantly men; men of an upper echelon used to wear lace; cheerleading started out as a boys’ club, and brewing beer was pioneered by women. Up until the early 2000s, many of these practices were reversed with women wearing dresses, adopting the color pink and wearing heels. However, in the last decade, there has been an upsurge in gender-neutral preferences such as unisex baby names, androgynous fashion, and even an increase in male cheerleading teams. Today we live in a world where gender identity has become more fluid. Gender fluidity speaks to a more flexible lifestyle, with interests and behaviors that are not bound by gendered conventions. **Gender fluid** people do not feel confined by stereotypical expectations of being a woman

or man; a man may be a ballet dancer and a woman may be a mechanic. For some people, gender fluidity extends beyond behavior and interests, and actually serves to specifically define their gender identity. In other words, a person may feel they are more female on some days and more male on others, or possibly feel that neither term describes them accurately.

As individual viewpoints on gender and sexuality have begun to change, this shift has been reflected in larger venues. Media has created a forum for pluralistic viewpoints through an upsurge of inclusive programming. With the popularity of shows such as *Ru Paul's Drag Race*, *The L Word*, *Transcendent*, and *Faking It*, an increase of gay and lesbian television and movie roles, and the popularity of spokespeople who are not heteronormative, such as Big Freedia, Laverne Cox, and Caitlyn Jenner, the larger world has engaged with themes of alternative gender and sexual identities. This is not just a "Hollywood" matter. Gender identity is blurring around the country. Retail chains are creating gender-neutral restroom facilities, universities are using gender-neutral ID cards, and in 2013, Colorado College made headlines when their job application allowed applicants to choose from the genders of "not disclosed," "male," "female," "transgender" and "queer." Children are also interested in sex reassignment surgery at earlier ages and the younger generation is vocal about being more sexually-fluid than previous generations.

Gender fluidity is theological as much as it is sociological. The terms employed to express the character of the deity are both masculine and feminine. For example, we say God is strong and mighty, a battle ax in trouble. These are things we associate with masculine behavior. We also say that God is meek, compassionate, giving, and caring. These are

things we traditionally identify with feminine behavior. Similar to God, human beings cannot be defined as solely masculine or feminine.

Unfortunately, an increase in hate and backlash has occurred as a result of more societal attention being placed on nonconforming identities. The LGBTQIA community has endured unlawful and unjustifiable hate crimes individually and collectively, including the 2016 shooting rampage at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Just as blacks have argued vehemently that “Black Lives Matter,” the LGBTQIA community has argued that “Rainbow Lives Matter” and “Trans Lives Matter.”

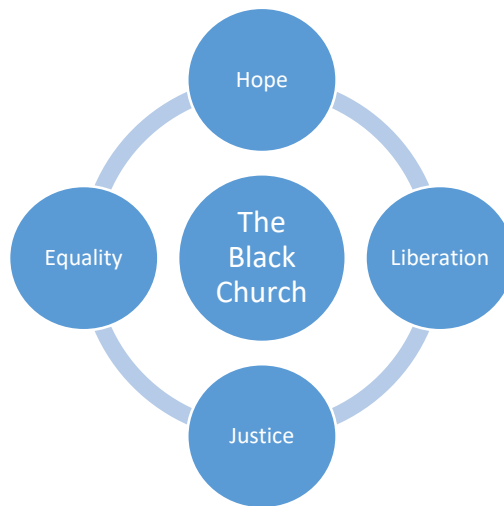
Changes in the law have provided limited relief. Although a 2015 U.S. Supreme Court ruling now allows gay couples to wed, shortly after that case was decided Kentucky clerk Kim Davis made headlines when she was held in contempt of court for refusing to issue same-sex marriage licenses.[10] In 2016, a Dallas County justice of the peace who refused to marry same-sex couples, Bill Metzger, was asked to resign for allowing his personal convictions to be imposed on a civil matter. The same antagonism has transpired for the trans community.[11] In 2015, a barbershop in Rancho Cucamonga made headlines when they refused service to a transgender army veteran who identified as male. That same year, a transgender woman was refused service at an Arizona bar and told “We don’t serve your kind here.”[12] Other such situations include a Michigan doctor who denied service to a newborn who had lesbian parents,[13] an Arkansas man who was refused funeral services for his gay partner and given antigay materials,[14] and transgender patients denied preventative healthcare.[15]

The Black Church has been the epicenter of not only spiritual change, but community change. We are edified, encouraged, and equipped with the Word so that we can

evangelize to the world. We are called to provide ministry to all people and extend the love of Christ to those who are marginalized by society. If they are not exposed to the love of God in church, how can we expect them to find it outside of church? The Black Church has historically been a safe haven and public voice for the voiceless. Yet, in recent years it has come under attack for its silence on contemporary justice issues.

The Black Church and The Disenfranchised

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. – Hebrews: 13:2



Throughout time, the prophetic tradition of the Black Church—by which we mean the powerhouse of ministers, activists, and laity who fought against bondage, oppression, suppression, and other social injustices, not to be confused with just any religious edifice comprised of a majority of blacks—established itself as a place of solace and refuge in times of need. Black clergy became the spokespeople for grievances of the black community and developed objectives and campaigns for expressing those grievances. The Church had a pivotal role in advocating for the rights of marginalized groups by engaging in freedom, justice, and equality movements. Such movements include:

- Abolition. Former slave and Methodist Frederick Douglas challenged Christians to confront the institution of slavery as it violated God's principle for equality. Black ministers joined white abolitionists to help organize the Underground Railroad. Harriett Tubman risked her life to help others escape bondage and obtain freedom.
- Emancipation and Reconstruction. Black churches in the north created missions to the south to help newly freed blacks gain the skills necessary to become independent. African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne,

along with other black missionaries, established educational institutions, which eventually led to the creation of a number of historically black colleges and universities.

- Civil Rights. Ministers and lay leaders rallied behind Rosa Parks for the Montgomery bus boycott when Ms. Parks was arrested and fined for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger. Minister Martin Luther King, Jr. and others formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with the goal of preventing segregation in the south. A number of churches protested and held marches.

Black ministers also cultivated a network of lay leaders through ministerial alliances, seminaries, and conventions, and taught them the importance of leadership, communal support, and activism. Although this active engagement in justice movements liberated thousands of people, the Post-Civil Rights Church has come under criticism for not mobilizing in the same way it did in the past, causing critics to conclude that the voice of the Black Church has been muted on a national level. Writer Ramon Mayo has stated that the Black Church lacks influence in the community for many reasons, including: failure to make faith and life intersect, hypocrisy, a lack of leadership, a lack of connection with the youth, and a lack of vision. [16] Critics argue that the prophetic and progressive voice of the Black Church has been eclipsed by the prosperity gospel which teaches individualistic instead of collectivistic advancement. Issues such as LGBTQIA rights and marriage equality have fallen on deaf ears as church-goers struggle to understand how to balance these concerns with their faith and self-identities.

Although every church may not be a forerunner in the justice movement, every church should have a plan of action for engaging its constituency in affairs that affect society.

The question then becomes, how are clergy and faith leaders going to minister to various groups of people in the contemporary era? How does one understand identity, gender, and sexuality in broader terms? What answers will the Church have for those who are trying to better understand their identity and circumstances? The mandate for justice provides the Church an opportunity to realign assumptions and transform conclusions regarding issues of marriage equality and LGBTQIA rights, as well as analyze and revamp notions, assumptions, and conclusions regarding the role of sex in human life. It is important for clergy and faith leaders to continue to be vocal on contemporary civil issues, and for them to fight against injustice and not perpetuate it through silence and indifference.

Why Should the Church Care?

Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. – James 2:17

Critics suggest that it is not the primary role of churches to fight for social justice but to warn people of divine justice—that is, the church should avoid policy statements and

discuss the immorality of issues without seeking change through political means. The problem with this mindset is that it promotes the idea that the church should abdicate responsibility for pressing social issues to solely focus on what is happening in the church. This exceptionalism played a role in excluding Claudette Colvin from a more visible role in the Civil Rights Movement. On March 2, 1955, nine months before Rosa Parks gave up her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama, 15-year old Claudette Colvin refused to stand for a white passenger who got on the bus. The NAACP and community leaders rejected Colvin's situation as a test case for segregation because she was young, unwed and pregnant whereas Rosa Parks was "morally clean." Colvin also believed her dark skin was also a factor.[17]

Dr. King contended, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." There have been blind spots in social progress, which allowed some groups to advance while excluding others. For example, heterosexual pastors have promoted "Black Lives Matter" movements, but they have been silent on areas of gender and sexuality. We have to be fully inclusive.

The fight against oppression runs through every era of biblical history. This shows that justice is not peripheral to the Christian witness; it is central to the foundation of the faith. Throughout the Bible, God called on people to challenge the injustices of world rulers. For example:

- Moses demanded Pharaoh to let God's people go (Exodus 5:1)
- Esther approached her husband, the King of Persia, on behalf of her people—the Hebrew people. (Esther 5)
- Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar to renounce his sins and show mercy to the oppressed (Daniel 4:27)

- The three Hebrew men—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—refused to bow at the behest of King Nebuchadnezzar. (Daniel 3)
- John the Baptist scolded Herod the tetrarch about the evil things he had done (Luke 3:19)
- Paul spoke with Felix, the Roman governor about God's impending judgment (Acts 24:25)

The Black Church has the same responsibility to fight for injustices regarding gender and sexuality. Turning a blind eye to injustice is equivalent to endorsing it. Martin Luther King Jr. memorably stated, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." God will ultimately provide divine justice, but God equips us with the tools to fight social injustice. The church is a witness to the world. It should show the world how to act in accordance with God's Word. If the church is inactive, what incentive do those outside the church have to be actively engaged? God's people are the light of the world, the salt of the earth, and the representatives of God.

The Church should also care about the plight of the marginalized because the well-being and life of the most vulnerable populations depend on it. Examine the condition of this world. In 2014, 6.9% of the U.S. population had at least one major depressive episode.[18] From 1999-2014, suicide rates increased 24% in the United States.[19] These conditions are often magnified for those with gender nonconforming and same-sex identities. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are twice as likely as their heterosexual peers to attempt suicide. Due to bullying and other daily stresses, LGBTQIA youth are at a greater risk of depression, substance use, and risky sexual behaviors.[20] Around 40%

of LGBTQIA folk are homeless.[21] Having an affirming support system creates higher self-esteem, more positive mental health, and more positive group identity.

Justice is not justice theoretical; it is practical. The Lord requires us to act justly and love mercy (Micah 6:8), and to do right and defend the oppressed (Isaiah 1:17), because the righteous care about justice (Proverbs 29:7). Justice is not a tangential concept of the Christian faith but that major project of the faith. Justice is indivisible. No group has a monopoly on justice. It is not relegated to a particular party, race, class, or sexual identity. Justice is not dispersed to a select few who are deemed “worthy” of it. Imagine if God operated that way; none of us would receive justice, grace or mercy. The Lord has provided a roadmap instructing how to live with and treat others. For Christians, the Bible is our source for providing clarity on matters of faith, godliness, and practice. It is important to understand how to interpret the scriptures and seek to understand them contextually as we aim to relate them to contemporary issues.

The Authority of Scripture

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. – 2 Timothy 3:16



The authority of scripture is drawn from a reading of the Bible in its ancient languages.

The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language, and the New Testament in Greek.

We must take into consideration five key elements when dissecting scripture: the

author, the time/culture, the language, the context, and the meaning. It is theologically irresponsible to take ancient texts out of context and apply them inaccurately to contemporary issues.

- The Author. Who wrote the passage? What was the author's background? What was their family situation or personal circumstances at the time they were of writing?
- The Time/Culture. When was the passage written? What were the political and economic experiences at the time of authorship? What about the culture and social customs? Were they able to express their faith openly? How was the calendar year different? Was it a period or season of time in which something significant happened?
- The Language. As previously stated, much of the Bible is written in Hebrew and Greek (parts of Daniel and Ezra are also written in Aramaic). What translation of the Bible is being used and how does it differ from other translations? What was list in transition from ancient times to the present? It is also important to note what tense is being used.

- The Context. What are the broader social, cultural, political, and literary circumstances of the text one is reading? What was the significance of that chapter at the time? What are the sociopolitical and economic contexts of the book? Who are the main characters? Where else do they appear? One must be careful not to read modern assumptions into the ancient texts.
- The Meaning. Hermeneutics is the art or science of interpretation. What is the broader theme of any particular book of the Bible? What is God communicating through the stories being told? It is important to understand the overall message being conveyed through the “words” of the passage (s) and what the verses mean holistically.

The Bible has been used to justify the oppression, hatred, and dehumanization. Care must be taken so as not to engage in distorting the meaning of the scriptures because it hinders the ability of the Church to spread the love and Good News of Jesus Christ, especially to those who need it. It does the Church and larger community a disservice to take ancient texts out of context and inaccurately apply them to contemporary issues.

Legalism or Love?

But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. – Romans 7:6

Throughout the history of the Church, legalism has been connected with the strict adherence to the letter of Scripture. Yet “literal” interpretations of Scripture often distort the text and end up demonizing groups of people based on factors such as race and gender. The Bible was used to enslave a race of people for over 245 years. The Bible is still used to prevent women from participating in leadership roles in the ministry. These same problematic interpretations are used to demonize people based on gender identity.

Societal Views on Homosexuality

Viewpoints regarding homosexuality have varied across time and across cultures. In Ancient Greece, homosexual relationships between men were considered one of the highest ideals of love, while heterosexual relationships were honored primarily for procreation. Homosexual acts were a part of religious activities, up to the 7th century B.C., when Jewish leaders condemned them as a way of establishing a uniqueness to their religion.[22] Historically, Christian leaders have predominantly viewed homosexuality and nonconforming sexual identities negatively, using Old and New Testament scriptures to support their views. In America, homosexuality was considered a perversion legally punishable through torture, castration, and death, by drowning and burning. In the early to mid-1900s, societal views shifted and homosexuality was considered a sickness in addition to a sin. Doctors performed lobotomies, and administered psychotherapy, electrical shock, hormones, and medication to “cure” homosexuals, and/or “convert them.”[23] Until 2003, sodomy laws—making sex between consenting same-sex adults a felony—were legally enforceable in the United States. Despite the Supreme Court’s 2003

ruling, as of 2016, 12 U.S. states continue to maintain anti-sodomy laws on their books. Globally, 72 countries still have anti-homosexuality laws.[24]

In the faith community, sanctions on same-sex marriage have differed across Christian denominational lines and amongst religions. Below is a chart of where major religious groups currently stand on gay marriage.[25]

Religious Groups and Same-Sex Marriage

Allow Same-Sex Marriage	Prohibit Same-Sex Marriage	No Clear Position
Episcopal Church	Roman Catholic Church	Buddhism
Conservative Jewish Movement	Orthodox Jewish	Hinduism
Reform Jewish Movement	Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints	
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	American Baptist Churches	
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)	Southern Baptist Convention	
Society of Friends (Quaker)	National Baptist Convention	
Unitarian Universalist Association of Churches	Assemblies of God	
United Church of Christ	Islam	
	Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod	
	United Methodist Church	

Even though many church policies prohibit gay marriages in the church, many clergy support their homosexual congregants and perform these ceremonies outside of the church.

Homosexuality vs. Homoeroticism

We often use a historical context to demonize homosexuality, however, our understanding of homosexuality has in fact changed over time. The term “homosexuality” is a relatively new word, dating back to the late-nineteenth century in Europe. Its definition was never universal. Based on cultural customs, it was considered a passive form of homoeroticism—a sexual attraction to and arousal by those of the same sex or gender. Homoeroticism referred to a practice, while homosexuality referred to an identity.[26] In patriarchal societies, the reason that homoeroticism (in an active sense) was considered unlawful was that it focused mainly on sexual violence and the use of coercion and force. This it was legally punishable by the methods aforementioned.

Using a historical context to demonize homosexuality (and other alternative forms of sexuality) today is problematic because it does not account for changing definitions of sexual identities, practices, and gender behavioral patterns between cultures, within cultures, and over time. The Bible has been used to censure homosexuality, however, what Scripture in fact condemned were acts of sexual violence. Indeed, the word “homosexuality” did not appear in English translations of the Bible until 1946. As a result, we must analyze what the Bible was referring to that contemporary culture has labeled as homosexuality.

Homosexuality and The Bible

The following verses are often cited to condemn homosexuality. Genesis 19:1-9 (focal verses 4-5), Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, 1 Timothy 1:9-10, 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10, and Romans 1:24-27 (focal verses 25-27). Care must be taken not to take these verses out of context or to project modern meanings onto ancient texts. Upon close examination,

each of these scriptural texts has less to do with consensual same-sex relationships and more to do with unlawful, exploitative sexual practices. [27]

Genesis 19:4-5: “Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.”

In Genesis 19, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed because of pride, inhospitality, injustice, sexual violence, and lack of welfare for the poor. In this chapter, a mob, comprised of men AND women, demanded to rape Lot’s guests, who were angels in the form of men (as is often the case in biblical interpretations of the angelic). Lot refused to hand over the angels, as they were his visitors and it was inhospitable harm guests under his roof. That crime would be more heinous than offering his daughters, which he chooses to do instead of leaving the angels vulnerable to attack. Earlier verses also elucidate that God had already decided to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah prior to the demand to rape Lot’s guests (see Genesis 18: 16-33).

Leviticus 18:22 – “Do not have sexual relations with a man [zakhar] as one does with a woman; that is detestable.

Leviticus 20:13 – “If a man [ish] has sexual relations with a man [zakhar] as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

Leviticus 18 and 20 are part of a holiness code which was designed to protect Israelites from idolatry and to differentiate them from pagan cultures of the Canaanites and Moabites. Some Israelite men served the pagan god Molech and were engaging in sexual activity with underage male prostitutes within the temple boundaries as part of a religious fertility ritual (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2). While the New International Version (NIV) uses one

word “man,” Hebrew text uses two words to differentiate “man” (*ish*) from “male” (*zakhar/zachar*). “Man” legally referred to someone old enough to marry, own land and vote, while “male” referred to those too young for these privileges.[28] In regards to who not to have sexual relations with, the Hebrew text refers to the word “zakhar,” which is an underage male—meaning, a man should not sleep with an underage boy as he would sleep with a woman. This abomination was punishable by death.

1 Timothy 1:9-10 – We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 – Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

In 1 Timothy 1 and 1 Corinthians 6, sexual exploitation through sex-trafficking of younger male prostitutes (enslavement and pedophilia) was at the core of both texts, as well as economic exploitation since elite adult men cultivated [sexual] relationships with young boys under the guise of “apprenticeships” and “personal development.” The passages focus on slave dealers and describe those who sleep with these young boys as committing heinous crimes. The NIV translation of 1 Timothy uses the word “homosexuality.” But as previously stated, that word entered into the English language in 1946 in the Revised Standard Version. The Greek text used the word “arsenokoites,” which is not the word for homosexual. Arsenokoites, is actually translated as “male-bedder,” known today as someone who practices pedophilia. If Paul in fact was referring to the practice of sexual activity between males, he would have used the word

"paiderasste." That was the standard Greek term at the time for sexual activity between males. 1 Corinthians also uses "arsenokoites" and upon textual analysis, the context refers to a behavior and not an orientation.

Romans 1:25-27 – They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

In Romans 1, it is assumed "unnatural relations" is synonymous with same-sex-loving relationships. However, the term refers to pagan idol worship through cultic sex orgies that disregarded familial relations or age. Orgies were popular in the Greco-Roman world. In this passage, the men and women exchanged their natural sexual practices for those which were perverse. Paul wanted to get to Rome because the "saints" there were being drawn away from the faith into idol worship.[29] There was a lot of social and cultural pressure (especially for elites) to join pagan religious associations/temples. Advancing socially, professionally, and economically, required joining these pagan religious associations. The price for entrance into this world was that people (1) changed their theological beliefs, and (2) changed their previous sexual practices in order to participate in the cultic sex orgies.

The argument used today to contend that homosexuality is a sin was once used to argue that heterosexual sex is a sin. In the Middle Ages (476 to around 1400 A.D.), theologians such as Thomas Aquinas argued that human sexual organs were designed for procreation and that any other use was heretical. He believed any type of sexual intercourse not intended for procreation deserved a more severe punishment than

murder.[30] By the 16th century, Protestant reformers, e.g. Martin Luther, still believed sex was a sin but it was a necessary evil. He recognized sex for more than procreation and believed it was acceptable in the confines of marriage to sustain the physical being of those in marriage.[31]

Throughout time, views about sexuality, sexual expression, sexual identity and gender roles has continued to shift, ranging from empowering affirmations to oppressive myths. The same diversity of views exists today.

Modern-Day Pharisees

The word “Pharisee” comes from the Greek word “pharisaios,” meaning “separated one.” In the Bible, the Pharisees were a group of religious leaders who considered themselves separated from Gentiles by reason of their holiness. They put the religious law above the Gospel through establishing harsh requirements that were often deemed unattainable and contradicted the ethics of salvation. They focused on self-righteousness more than righteousness and Temple worship more than a personal relationship with God. They believed they could earn a relationship with God or earn God's blessings. This mindset led them to conclude that they were superior because they followed a set of rules and regulations. The Pharisees had a long list of people they shunned, including the sick, women, and tax collectors. These groups were considered to be impure, sinners, unworthy, and beyond God's grace. They condemned Jesus to death for blasphemy and for rejecting their laws. The irony is that the Pharisees considered themselves to be the stewards of God's word, but they rejected the one whom God sent to save them: Christ. Oftentimes, members of the church function as modern-day Pharisees, believing that their lifestyles are superior to others. They treat those of a different class, race, gender, sexual

identity, religion, country of origin, or physical ability as though they have no right to serve God. They have the ability to perceive failures of others but not failures of their own. In Mathew 7:3-5 and Luke 6:42, Jesus states “How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”

The issue is hypocrisy. Imagine preachers and congregations who give a pass to adultery, which is detrimental to the family, while preaching against homosexuality, which is not a sin according to hermeneutical understanding. On a daily basis we commit acts that should repeal our salvation; however, God continues to give new mercies every day. Romans 5:8 states “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This was not just a one-time occurrence; we continuously sin and fall short of the glory of God. There is no amount of ritual or tradition that we can partake in to make us worthy of salvation. God can use any and every person to advance His Kingdom. We must be careful not to rank sins and judge someone else's walk because they do not live the same way we do. This is not a hall pass to turn a blind eye to moral indiscretions or create an ethically lax environment. This is a challenge to place love and justice above judgment.

Is Homosexuality a Threat?

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. – Galatians 3:28

Homosexuality and the Black Community

In the church, we must address the myths that homosexuality is a threat to the black church/family/community and that it is the responsibility of the LGBTQIA community to

handle their own issues. The church has a strong influence on its members and it is often difficult for people to transcend the beliefs they were taught, even at the expense of their own health and those around them. The mere mention of LGBTQIA issues can bring a sense of anxiety to some. When Christians are asked why they oppose homosexuality, the answers usually include the following: it goes against the Bible, it goes against what I was taught, it is a sin, it goes against nature, or it destroys the Black family. But these answers are hardly sufficient to those suffering and seeking solace.

Arguing that homosexuality is a threat to the black family relegates it to a “black” issue. However, there has been support and resistance for LGBTQIA activities both from within and outside the black community. White televangelists and politicians have expressed opposition in the public sphere. Televangelist Pat Robertson, Vice President Michael Pence, and former Senate Majority leader Trent Lott have all been vocal opponents of homosexuality, with Pence and Lott vowing not to support any legislation that promotes LGBTQIA issues. Alternatively, black civil rights leaders such as Jesse Jackson and Coretta Scott King, Asian actor/activist George Takei, white singer/activist Lady Gaga, and English activist Peter Tatchell have championed legislation that promotes equality. Blacks are so passionate about the issue of homosexuality not because it is a “black issue,” but because it is rooted in our history, culture, and beliefs.

History

While homosexuality is not a race issue, behind the homophobia that persists in the black community resides history of sexual exploitation and oppression.[23] During slavery and Jim Crow, white slave masters psychologically, and physically, emasculated black men. A pillar of the home as leaders, providers and protectors, black men were taken away

from their families, sold into slavery, and constantly reminded of their inferiority. During slavery, there was a practice known as “breaking the buck” where “defiant” male slaves were beaten and sodomized in front of family and friends to humiliate them and force them into submission. This also sent a message to family and friends not to rebel against slave masters. Male slaves were first inspected around the age of 15 and often castrated if considered to be underdeveloped. To combat the high death rate amongst slaves, black men were expected to impregnate 12 women a year. Black women faced equal oppression at the hands of white slave masters and their wives. The sexuality of black women was controlled as they were expected to begin having children at 13 and were often raped and subjected to cruelty by the slave master’s wife. This reinforced the notion that sex was meant for procreation. During Jim Crow black men were expected to smile and say “Yes sir,” “Mister,” or “Missus” while being called “boy” or the “N” word. They were also expected to laugh at the beatings of their people, and they were emasculated through castration and lynching. Talking to white women was forbidden and punishable by death. The same oppressive behavior was felt by black women, as they were raped by white slave masters and relegated to stereotypical positions such as the Mammy (the unattractive domesticated servant), Jezebel (the loose, sexual manipulator), or Sapphire (the hostile aggressor).[33]

This history of subjugation was never obliterated and continues to permeate black culture to this day. In his book *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Carter G. Woodson argues that when you control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. We have been programmed to see manhood, womanhood, and sexuality in polarizing ideologies in an effort to process the physical and psychological pain of the past.

Culture

After the Civil War, the culture of heteronormativity assisted in reestablishing the black family unit after this history of sexual abuse. To review, homonormativity is the bias that presumes and favors opposite-sex marital and sexual relations, and reinforces behavior or attitudes consistent with traditional male or female gender roles. It tends to reject homosexuality as a natural form of relational and sexual expression. In the black community, heteronormativity implicitly states that black men should be “manly,” “strong,” “emotionless,” and “virile,” while black women are expected to be “dainty,” “submissive,” “sensitive,” and “gentle.” A man or woman who displays otherwise (e.g. an effeminate man or a masculine woman) is considered a threat because he or she diverges from what is regarded as the “norm.”

The heteronormative perspective also assumes that heterosexual relationships are necessary for procreation. This perspective is flawed because there are many heterosexual relationships in the black community where procreation is neither an aspiration nor a possibility. Equally problematic is the way in which those who regard homosexuality as a threat to black survival often overlook other issues that are actually a threat to survival such as alcoholism, unhealthy dietary practices, drug use, adultery, sexual incest/abuse, domestic abuse, and other types of abuse. It is not homosexuality, but homophobia that destroys the family because it fosters depression and causes those who identify as LGBTQIA to engage in secretive and risky behaviors counterproductive to healthy lifestyles. Unhealthy individuals create unhealthy families, and vice versa.

Beliefs

God never told us to display hate, and God never told us that acceptance of one group was rejection of another. Becoming a more inclusive community requires the Church to become more biblically literate since Scripture is our authority on matters of faith and practice. Anti-gay interpretations of Scripture are often people's attempts to be faithful to what they were taught. Many black people were taught not to question God and the Bible, but they were never taught to examine whether their interpretations of God's word are accurate. As readers, we also bring to the text our social and cultural biases.

The Bible has been used countless times to justify homophobia. Kelly Brown Douglas stated that homophobia has guided our reading of the Bible, as opposed to the Bible guiding our interpretation of homophobia—biased eyes find support for the bias, especially when utilized to oppress other people.[34] Select passages of the Bible were used to endorse slavery, and slaves were prevented from reading it themselves so that they did not learn about the larger context of love and equality. If the Bible was unfairly used to justify slave masters profiting off of the human misery of institutionalized slavery, it can also be used in other unjust ways. One could argue that utilizing the Bible to economically, mentally, physically, and spiritually enslave LGBTQIA people, another marginalized group, is also unjust.

It is important to note that these negative views do not necessarily come from a malevolent place. If one was taught that something was wrong, it is difficult to look at a few verses and surmise that biblical scholarship (or an interpretation of it) has the power to override these beliefs. And it may be easier to simply look the other way. However, the fight for inclusion should not be waged only by those being marginalized. This is not a black or white issue, a hetero- or homosexual issue, nor a male or female issue, but rather

an issue for everyone. Silence and antagonism only exacerbate the issues. Homosexuality does not destroy the black family. Black family lifestyles and homosexual lifestyles are not antithetical. The gender and sexuality of one person is not threatened by that of another. The Church is one important avenue for creating a cultural shift of understanding. Attitudes are beginning to shift in the black Protestant tradition. Today, 61% of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 38% of the Church of God in Christ, and 54% of the National Baptist Convention believe homosexuality should be accepted in the church.[36] However, there is still progress to be made.

Would Jesus Discriminate?

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. –
1 Corinthians 13:13

Jesus operated from a place of love. He denounced the philosophies of the Pharisees, calling them hypocritical, spiritually blinding, and evil (Matthew 23). He accused the Pharisees of being ostentatious and creating impossible regulations that enslaved instead

of liberated. Jesus demonstrated how their legalism was void of mercy and how they neglected their spiritual side while creating a façade of perfection and pseudo-holiness. In a time when division and hate were default responses, Jesus's Hebrew faith and the authentic Jesus Movement offer a vision of inclusiveness that transcend any single biblical parable.

1. Leviticus 19:14: Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord.
2. 1 Samuel 16:7: The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”
3. Matthew 7:12: Do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.
4. Luke 10: 27: 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, Love your neighbor as yourself.
5. Romans 12:16: Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.
6. Galatians 3: 28: There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
7. James 2:8: If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right.

Jesus showed love to those who were considered outcasts and unworthy of redemption. Jesus healed the sick (Matthew 14:14) and raised the dead and defiled (John 11:35, 38); Jesus's love commanded followers to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, embrace the stranger, and quench the thirst of the thirsty (Matthew 25:31-

46); Jesus cast out demons without demonizing persons (Matthew 8:16). Jesus's love interceded for his disciples and future followers (John 17:20-21). Most importantly, Jesus's love provided salvation to the world (John 3:16) and not just a select few.

Creating a Safe Haven

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. –
Hebrews 13: 1-2

As human beings, we are more similar than dissimilar, although we have the tendency to spend more time focusing on our differences. We all have been complimented and criticized, liked and disliked, understood and misunderstood, and we have all felt a sense of belonging and alienation. Most importantly, although we have differing viewpoints, we

as Christians all serve the same God who values us as One's creation. We have a tendency to favor certain groups because doing so provides a greater sense of belongingness. However, a shared history of racial injustice and economic terrorism among blacks should be incentive enough not to oppress others. Those who are quick to ban people with non-conforming gender identities from leadership positions and membership in the church, due to a particular conceptualization of sin and sinfulness open themselves up for judgment. If we are honest, we all have growth areas that demand our attention and grace. There is no room to judge others.

The church should be a place where all people are welcome. Leaders help to establish the culture of their faith institutions and organizations. If the church is filled with people who are prideful, rigid, cliquish, bullying, and stingy, why should anyone want to be a part of it? Culture is shaped by everything from the leadership of the church, to its values, vision statement, and the attitudes and behaviors of its members. Effective leaders will help shape the culture by grounding the practices and language in the teachings and ministry of Jesus. Even in the face of opposition, Jesus used God's word when He wanted to change the culture of the temple of Jerusalem:

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking

for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. (Mark 11:15-19)

We must also be fearless in our pursuit of justice. Is your religious institution or organization a hospital for the sick or a breeding ground for moral infection and social disease? Below are some methods for ensuring that you are helping to foster a welcoming space for people of all backgrounds.

Healing in the Church

It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. – Mark 2:17

The church is a place for spiritual healing much like the hospital is a place for physical healing. If we are sick, we want to know that we will be treated with the best care possible.



In order to provide “top-rated” care, churches must:

- Create a culture of welcome. Everyone should be welcomed with the same friendly greeting. Each person should be treated as valuable and not as a burden or inconvenience. Regardless of race, gender, sexual identity, or personality, individuals should feel as though they are coming home when they enter the church. This requires consistent training of hospitality teams, church leadership and staff. This can also be the subject of sermons and Bible study series. (Refer to Matthew 11:28-29.)
- Be willing to listen. Does the church have a microwave mentality—speeding through life in a hurry to get to the next activity—or an oven mentality—taking time to listen to and appreciate others? Good doctors will have conversations with patients to find out their symptoms, worries, and current medications before making a diagnosis. The church must do the same, treating each person as an individual and not a burdensome project. (Refer to John 3, where Jesus engages Nicodemus in dialogue.)
- Continue to learn. Doctors and other health professionals are required to maintain certifications and keep up with training to better serve their patients. Churches and other religious organizations must also have leadership training on how to better serve their constituencies. It is not only about being knowledgeable about the Word; we must be knowledgeable about how to communicate with and treat

others. We cannot assume that everyone will have a high level of church decorum.

(Refer to Luke 10:38-42, where Mary learns at the feet of Jesus.)

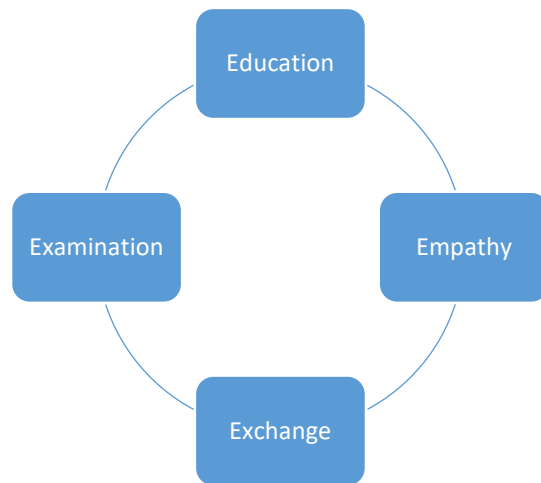
- Receive follow-up. Health professionals often tell patients to follow-up. Great health professionals send reminders. They also have surveys to obtain feedback on their performance. In the church, it is also important to follow-up with visitors and members, check in to make sure they are doing well and ask for feedback. Obtaining and listening to feedback gives major insight into methods for better serving constituents. (Refer to John 5, when Jesus heals the man at the Pool of Bethesda and meets him again in the temple.)

As God's children, we will be recognized by the fruit we produce. Let's make an active effort to reflect the same love Christ shows to us.

A Call to Action

It is time to have the courage to challenge injustices and to treat people as Jesus treated people. The Black Church must be an inclusive community, one that embraces the rich theological, social, and cultural diversity of the people we serve. We must aim to love, listen, and learn from one another as we aim to create a beloved community. This will

enable us to ensure that we are not turning people away from the church and away from a relationship with Christ.



1. We must **EDUCATE** ourselves about what is happening in society. The way we preach and teach will evolve based on our constituency and the issues that are affecting our communities. The congregation is not only influenced by what is in the church (e.g., the Bible and sermons), but also by what is outside of the church (television, music, literature, and everyday interactions). There are certain topics and rhetoric that one may not be comfortable with but will arise in daily exchanges. Use the attached “Glossary Terms” to familiarize yourself with the proper terminology to use when addressing diverse populations.
2. We must carefully **EXAMINE** and reexamine the scriptures to make sure that what we are saying aligns with the Bible. When dissecting the Bible, carefully consider the author, the time/culture, the language, the context, and the meaning. We must

be cautious not to impose our personal or cultural biases on the text. It is important to remember that the Bible is a guide to better understand how to obtain salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. It is not a tool for judging and beating down others to make ourselves feel better. Based on this guide, we have seen how the few references to same-sex acts in the Bible refer to acts of sexual violence and exploitation. It would therefore be inaccurate to say, as is often said, that “the Bible condemns homosexuality.”

3. We must show EMPATHY towards those who have a background and acculturation different from that to which we are accustomed. Understand that there are many people suffering from *church hurt*: feelings resulting from confusing, contradicting, and damaging lessons taught and learned in church. Create a safe space that invites people to raise existential questions without presuming to know the answer. Understand that the smallest gestures of recognizing someone’s existence, such as saying hello or giving a hug, can make a difference to those struggling in their personal lives. The Bible exhorts in Matthew 25:40: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”
4. We must EXCHANGE through dialogue; two-way communication is important. Everyone deserves to have a voice. Seek ways to engage the most vulnerable populations. Talk to members of different ages in your church or faith group and find out what is going on in their lives. Host Bible study and focus groups, get on social media and ask questions, and make sure constituents have some way of

giving feedback via email, direct mail, website, or other methods. This will not only enhance your relationships, but it will also enhance your relatability. This is not something you can do once and move along with your daily agenda. Continuously immerse yourself in two-way dialogue.

Trying to navigate one's own identity as a Christian in a secular world can be challenging for anyone. Regardless of our circumstances and experiences, we have a collective identity in Christ. The world tells us that identity is tied to experiences, people, and things. However, God tells us that our identity can be found through Him—He who is in us in greater than He who is in the world. (1 John 4:4) It is important for us to be conscious of our personal attitudes and behaviors that can hinder the ability of the Church to spread the love and Good News of Jesus Christ to those who need it. Being a Christian is not about perfection. It is about receiving the Lord as Savior, having a relationship with God, trusting in Him and not our own efforts, and relying on Him for grace and mercy.

Glossary of Terms

Agenderism – lacking a desire to identify with any gender.

Androgyny – the expression of masculine and feminine characteristics through appearance, behavior, and sexual identity.

Asexualism – lacking desire or having a low level of physical, emotional, mental, romantic and/or sexual attraction to any gender or sex.

Bicurious – someone who is open to exploring bisexuality.

Bigenderism – distinctively or simultaneously alternating between male and female gender expressions through such things as appearance and mannerisms.

Biophobia – fear and/or intolerance towards those who have an affinity for more than one gender/sex.

Bisexuality – the physical, emotional, mental, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to two genders or two sexes.

Cisgenderism – characterized by one whose biological sex and gender identity align.

Cis-sexualism – characterized as an individual who chooses to keep the biological sex assigned to them at birth.

Closeted – someone who hides their true sexual identity (normally that which is not heteronormative) from others, often out of fear of ridicule, rejection, or persecution.

Coming Out – the process of sharing one's sexual identity or gender identity (typically an LGBTQIA identity) with others.

Cross-dressing – wearing clothing that is stereotypical of another gender.

Down Low (DL) – a closeted male who appears to others to be heterosexual but has homosexual desires and tendencies that he might secretly act on.

Drag-king – a woman who performs as a man theatrically.

Drag-queen – a man who performs as a woman theatrically.

Female – distinguished by biology; usually denoting the presence of a uterus, vagina, and ovaries, and carrying 2 “X” chromosomes.

Femme - a person who predominantly displays stereotypically “feminine” appearance and behavior, usually referring to a lesbian.

Gay – a general term used to describe those attracted to members of the same sex. Sometimes people use this term to refer solely to male relationships.

Gender – the subclass (e.g. male, female, other) by which one identifies based on socio-cultural instead of biological characteristics.

Gender-fluid – changing one’s gender over time or identifying with more than one gender. One may choose in various instances to be a woman, a man, other, or a combination of genders.

Genderqueer – see “Gender-variant.”

Gender-variant – an umbrella term used to describe those who are gender-nonconforming: agender, bigender, genderfluid, gender-queer, etc).

GSM – An acronym used to describe Gender and Sexual Minorities

Hermaphroditism – see “Intersexuality.”

Heteronormativity – the assumption that heterosexuality is the dominant or superior form of sexuality.

Heterosexuality – the physical, emotional, mental, romantic and/or sexual attraction to those of the opposite sex or gender.

Homosexuality – the physical, emotional, mental, romantic and/or sexual attraction to those of the same sex or gender.

Homophobia – fear and/or intolerance towards LGBTQIA individuals.

Identity – the understanding of who one is or how one identifies.

Intersexuality – a general term used to describe the condition of those who are born with sex organs that are not clearly defined as male or female. It is a contemporary term for hermaphroditism.

LGBTQIA – one of various acronyms used to describe the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual communities.

Lesbianism – a woman displaying a physical, emotional, mental, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to another woman.

Male – distinguished by biology; usually denoting the presence of a penis, scrotum, and testicles, and carrying a “Y” chromosome.

Man – a term describing one’s own mentality regarding and/or society’s cultural expectations of masculinity. Not based on biology.

Masculine-presenting woman – a person who predominantly displays a stereotypically “masculine” appearance and behavior. Also known as a “non-gender performing” woman.

Metrosexuality – characterizing a heterosexual male who dedicates a great deal of time tending to his appearance and grooming, often superseding what is considered to be gender-normative.

Outing – disclosing the sexual identity or gender identity of someone without their permission.

Polyamory – having an affinity for a nontraditional, non-monogamous relationships such as polyandry, polygamy, and swinging.

Polyandry – marriage that includes a woman having more than one husband.

Polygamy – the practice of having more than one spouse, usually referring to a man with more than one wife.

Pansexuality – the physical, emotional, mental, romantic and/or sexual attraction to all genders and sexes: male, female, transgender, intersex, or agender/genderqueer.

Polysexuality – the physical, emotional, mental, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to some gender variant people but not all.

Sex – the biological categorization of male and female based on reproductive functioning.

Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) – surgically changing one’s biological sex. Also known as gender confirmation surgery.

Sexual Identity (Sexual Orientation) – the sex/gender(s) to which one is physically, emotionally, mentally, romantically, and/or sexually attracted.

Sexuality – a person’s sexual identity or preference; the capacity to express sexual feelings.

Skoliosexuality – characteristic of one who is attracted to transsexuals or those who identify as genderqueer.

Swinging – Those in a relationship choosing to engage in sexual activities with other couples or individuals for recreation. Also known as partner-swapping.

Transgenderism – using identity (e.g., appearance and mannerisms) to express a gender other than what was assigned at birth. Focuses less on biology and more on mentality.

Transitioning – the process of surgically and/or hormonally altering one's sex to align with one's preferred gender.

Transphobia – fear and/or intolerance towards those who are transgendered or transsexual.

Transsexualism – not identifying with the sex one is assigned at birth. Often, transsexuals choose to transition from one biological sex to another through medical intervention (such as surgery and hormones) to align their body with the gender with which they identify.

Transvestite – see “Crossdresser.”

Woman – a term describing one's own mentality regarding gender and/or society's cultural expectations of femininity. Not based on biology.

Ministry Support Services

Ministries and Organizations

Affirmation (Mormon)
P.O. Box 46022
Los Angeles, CA 90046-0022
(323) 255-7251
www.affirmation.org

154 Christopher St., #3-C
New York, NY 10014
(212) 741-9110, ext. 18
www.aalusc.org

Affirmation (United Methodist)
P.O. Box 1021 Evanston, IL 60204
(847) 733-9590
www.umaffirm.org

Al-Fatiha Foundation (Muslim)
P.O. Box 33532
Washington, D.C. 20033
(202) 319-0898
www.al-fatiha.net

African Ancestral Lesbians United for SocialChange, Inc.

Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists

P.O. Box 2596
Attleboro Falls, MA 02763-0894
(508) 226-1945
www.wabaptists.org

Audre Lorde Project
147 West 24th Street, 3rd Floor
New York, New York 10011-1911
(212) 463-0342
www.alp.org

**Brethren/Mennonite Council for
Lesbian and Gay Concerns**
P.O. Box 6300 Minneapolis, MN 55406
(612) 722-6906
www.webcom.com/bmc/welcome.html

Black AIDS Institute
1833 West 8th Street #200
Los Angeles, CA 90057
(213) 353-3610
www.blackaids.org

Dignity/USA (Catholic)
1500 Massachusetts Ave., Ste. 8, N.W.
Washington, DC 20005-1894
(800) 877-8797
www.dignityusa.org

**Emergence International (Christian
Scientist)**
P.O. Box 26237
Phoenix, AZ 85068
(800) 280-6653
www.emergence-international.org

**Evangelicals Concerned with
Reconciliation**
P.O. Box 19734
Seattle, WA 98109-6734
(206) 621-8960
www.ecwr.org

Gay Buddhist Fellowship
2215-R Market St., PMB 456
San Francisco, CA 94114
(415) 974-9878
www.gaybuddhist.org
Human Rights Campaign
1640 Rhode Island Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 628-4160
TTY 202/216-1572
www.hrc.org

Integrity (Episcopalian)
1718 M St., N.W., PMB 148
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 462-9498
www.integrityusa.org

**LGBT Faith Leaders of African
Descent**
P.O. Box 14, Cathedral Station
New York, NY, 10025
www.lgbtfload.org

Lutherans Concerned
P.O. Box 10461
Chicago, IL 60610
www.lcna.org

**Many Voices: A Black Church
Movement for Gay & Transgender
Justice**
3133 Dumbarton Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007
www.manyvoices.org

More Light Presbyterians
4737 County Rd., 101
Minnetonka, MN 55345-2634
www.mlp.org

National Black Justice Coalition
P.O. Box 1229

New York, NY 10037
(212) 330-6599
www.nbjcoalition.org/

National Minority AIDS Council
1931 13th St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20009
202/483-6622
www.nmac.org

**Office of GLBT Concerns for
Unitarian Universalists Association**
25 Beacon St.
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 948-6475
www.uua.org/obgltc

Rainbow Baptists
P.O. Box 3183
Walnut Creek, CA 94598
www.rainbowbaptists.org

**Reconciling Pentecostals
International**
**United Methodists of Color for
a Fully Inclusive Church**
3801 N. Keeler Avenue
Chicago, IL 60641
773/736-5526
www.umoc.org

**Unity Fellowship Church
Movement (African American)**
5148 West Jefferson Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90016
(323) 938-8322
www.unityfellowshipchurch.org

**World Bisexual and Transgender
Jews**
P.O. Box 23379
Washington, DC 20026-3379

34522 N. Scottsdale Rd., D-8 Suite 238
Scottsdale, AZ 85262
(480) 595-5517
www.reconcilingpentecostals.com

**SDA Kinship International (Seventh-
Day Adventist)**
P.O. Box 49375 Sarasota, FL 34250
(866) 732-5677
www.sdakinship.org

**The Fellowship of Affirming
Ministries**
1271 Washington Avenue, Box 220
San Leandro, CA 94577
<http://www.radicallyinclusive.com/>

**United Fellowship of Metropolitan
Community Churches**
8704 Santa Monica Blvd., 2nd Fl.
West Hollywood, CA 90069
(310) 360-8640
www.ufmcc.com

202/452-7424
www.glbtejews

**World Congress of Gay, Lesbian,
Bisexual and Transgender Jews**
P.O. Box 23379
Washington, DC 20026-3379
202/452-7424
www.glbtejews.org

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