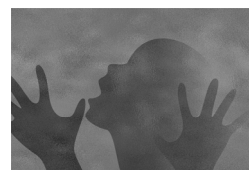


## Tool 13: Sexual Diversity: What is the Holy Spirit saying to the churches at this time?

### FACILITATOR'S GUIDE



*"There will never come a time when people in Kenya will OK homosexuality, because we have very very strong anti-gay elements in society, and they are embedded in us."* Denis Nzioka, Kenyan LGBT activist.

## Introduction

Thank you for your commitment to taking people in your church and community on this journey. It is a difficult journey, because sexual diversity is a complex and difficult topic. Prejudice against LGBTI people runs deep in our societies, churches, and thus in our own minds and hearts. It arouses strong emotions.

This also makes it very difficult to facilitate. That is why this short Facilitator's Guide has been developed.

For a general Facilitator's Guide, and to understand the basic educational methodology used, please refer to Practical Tool 3.

## Who is the Tool designed for?

The Tool presumes that the participants are not at all familiar with LGBTI concepts or issues, although they might have some awareness of gender issues. Some groups will be open, others very closed.

The theological section caters for people with a Christian church background. But the first and last parts can be used with anyone from any background. People generally learn prejudice through their socialisation, and the church plays a big role in that for many people in Southern Africa. So working with the 8 Bible passages used to argue that homosexuality is a sin, can be useful for non-church-goers with a Christian family background too.

### **TIP: Understanding who your participants are will help you facilitate the process better.**

So find out as much as you can about them before they come, and spend time getting to know them each when you begin.

## How is the tool structured?

This Tool has been very carefully structured. It takes people on a gradual journey in a safe (though not unchallenging) environment.

It follows the basic conscientisation and mobilisation process developed by IAM over many years. It is based on the **Wheel of Change**.

Before you begin any training process, please refer to pages 290-291, and go through the Time to Talk exercise that gives participants an overview of the process based on the Wheel of Change. Make sure you understand the mind behind it, and how it is applied in the different sections of the Tool.

This Tool moves from a 'defrosting' stage, which helps participants to 'put down their arms', through helping them to recognise our common humanity, regardless of our background and persuasion.

Following the Wheel of Change, it then works to **open hearts and minds**, not just through giving people information, but through exposing them to real people's stories of rejection, heartbreak, confusion and finding themselves. Discovering one's sexuality is a common human journey, but it is made more difficult by prejudice and stigma. This is the largest part of this Tool. The Tool then takes seriously the link between **empowerment** to take an issue forward, and being well **networked and informed**. It ends with some ideas for how to build **change agents** in our congregations and communities, and closes with a declaration of commitment to **open doors** of churches to become inclusive.



### A little more about defrosting:

It is important to help participants relax, by using activities to help them feel that they are valued, respected as they are, and that their contribution to the process is valued. There are many types of ice breakers to this, and a facilitator needs to choose them wisely, depending on the age group and type of people in a group<sup>65</sup>.

## What are some of the challenges in sexual diversity work?

### Resistance, fear and strong emotions, and lack of awareness of bias

Every human being is influenced by their own story – their experiences, education and socialisation. We all have certain 'buttons' that, if pushed, can cause a strong reaction! When talking about sensitive issues that affect our identity, it is even more likely. This is the same for both participants and facilitators.

#### TIPS:

- Avoid going into a workshop process 'cold'. Before the workshop, have an ongoing conversation with leaders or activists in the church or community where it is to take place. Make sure that you have been invited, and that the organiser has invited participants who will engage sincerely with this issue.
- Make sure the group agrees on what will make the space safe (see pg. 248), and do not be shy to enforce (gently but firmly) the rules of engagement decided on there.
- Watch for the reactions of participants – their body language, tone of voice, raising their voice, language they use. Try to be sensitive. Don't push too hard, but also be ready for a possible explosion. Do not take anything personally!
- Be wary of direct and indirect hate speech. Protect everyone from hate speech in all its disguises, while respecting freedom of speech and the expression of differing opinions, without intent to offend.
- Remember, you have your own biases too! Be aware of your own 'buttons', and when your emotions are stirred up. Do not give in to them, but try to focus on the matter under discussion. Be aware of your own use of language. It is easy to uncritically use prejudiced language without thinking about its impact on people.

<sup>65</sup> Some websites with fun ideas are: <http://ctl.mesacc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/FunGames.pdf>; [http://insight.typepad.co.uk/40\\_icebreakers\\_for\\_small\\_groups.pdf](http://insight.typepad.co.uk/40_icebreakers_for_small_groups.pdf); <http://www.greatgroupgames.com/icebreaker-games-for-adults.htm>

- Sometimes, LGBTI people can become very emotional during this process, especially if they have never come out of the closet, or they have suffered greatly. Research information about appropriate counsellors in their area BEFORE you facilitate a process.

### **The facilitator can be stigmatised or discredited by powerful participants**

People who feel threatened can easily hunt down the messenger! So expect some participants to try to undermine you personally, instead of talking about the questions at hand. This can completely destroy a process, because it can convince people not to take the facilitator seriously.

#### **TIPS:**

- If possible, always facilitate in a team of 2 – preferably a mixed team – man/woman, a heterosexual ally and an LGBTI person. You don't need to be ordained, but it does help! Support each other.
- Be very well prepared. Study the Toolkit (especially the theological sections if you are going to meet clergy). Read more. Use the Resources section in the Tool (pp 294-297).
- Establish trust very early on. Participants need to trust your expertise, but also your integrity and sincerity as a person, and that you respect them and will not judge them nor try to convert them.

### **A defensive attitude about the Bible**

Many people have deeply engrained habits when it comes to using the Bible. They may believe that their interpretation (often learnt from someone else) is the only correct one. They can feel very threatened when someone comes with different ideas, and can resort to questioning the very foundations of that person's faith (-another way to discredit facilitator, as above). This makes it hard for a facilitator, but even harder for other participants, especially if the power relations are unequal in the group.

#### **TIP:**

Avoid arguing about isolated verses. Rather invite the group to explore why it happens that people argue about what Bible verses mean in the first place. Use pp 262-266 on ways to read the Bible, pitfalls when reading it, and examples of shifts in biblical understanding to respond to contextual changes. Then, when they are more open, it is possible to look again at the old favourite verses.

### **Criminalisation of sexual diversity in some countries**

In some countries, it is a criminal offence to even speak about sexual diversity, because of the myth that people can become influenced to become homosexual or transgender, or that it is contagious!

#### **TIPS:**

- Do an environmental scan on how the Law deals with LGBTI in a country, or statutes in a church, and set up a basic security plan. Ask your host for advice.
- Do not risk other people's lives by arriving with banned documents!
- Make sure you have been invited, and that your host and participants are fully aware of the risks involved.
- Open up space for participants to talk about their fears and anxieties, and to devise plans together.

## A useful Resource: Stages in the life of an emerging homosexual

The extract below can be useful for counselling and supporting people who are on a journey to come to terms with their sexuality if it is not heterosexual. It is useful for parents and church or school counsellors.

*"Cass (1979) has identified six stages of identity formation: confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride, and synthesis. (It usually takes place at adolescence, but can happen at any time in a person's life.)"*

*In **Stage 1 – identity confusion** – heterosexual identity is called into question with the adolescent's increasing awareness of feelings of intimate and physical attraction towards others of the same sex: "Could I be homosexual?". S/he may become personally interested to learn more about gays and lesbian, and be less interested in the 'opposite' sex. Confusion is great and denial is usually the primary coping strategy.*

***Stage 2 – identity comparison** – A person begins to accept that homosexual feelings may be part of who they are: "I might be homosexual". Or they may try to explain away a same-gender sexual attraction as a special case (it just happens to be this one person I am attracted to and he/she happens to be the same sex). Or the person may think that "I may be bisexual" (which could mean they might also be heterosexual). "This is a phase I'm going through" may surface. At this stage, a person is trying to make sense of their same-sex attractions and their view of themselves as heterosexual. It is a way of dealing with the awareness of being different from larger society, a sense of not belonging and feeling like they must be the only one "like this."*

***Stage 3 – identity tolerance** – The person starts to admit: "I probably am homosexual." This helps dispel the confusion and turmoil of prior stages, but creates a greater distance from others. This can be especially hard for teens, who need peer approval and acceptance. The homosexual teen is forced to scrutinise every action to maintain his or her secret, and they 'mask' who they are: convincingly acting heterosexual despite grappling internally with their identity. They must constantly work at separating their private and public self. This can undermine their intimate relationships with family and friends, because the person knows they are based on untruth.*

*Positive experiences are crucial to developing a degree of self-acceptance (vs self-hatred) during this period. Contacting other gay, lesbian, and/or bisexual people becomes more pressing, to alleviate their sense of isolation and alienation, and to find a place where they feel accepted for their whole being and not just for their 'mask'.*

***Stage 4 – identity acceptance** – involves increasing contact with other gays and lesbians and developing a clearer homosexual identity. Finding other gay and lesbian teens is difficult. Those in rural areas often find the isolation nearly unbearable. Many of these young people feel a need to leave home and school and move to an urban area simply to make contact with other gay, lesbian and bisexual people.*

*Those adolescents fortunate enough to have access to support groups and/or gay social events often live a kind of dual lifestyle – being heterosexual publicly and bi- or homosexual privately. With this comes the fear of being 'discovered'. But they begin to feel better about who they are and how they fit in.*

***Stage 5 – identity pride** – the individual is part of gay and lesbian subculture and begins to have less and less involvement with the heterosexual community. They have a "them and us" mentality and can devalue anything to do with heterosexuality.*

***Stage 6 – identity synthesis** – the person begins to realise that the heterosexual and homosexual worlds have a lot in common. S/he has less rigid polarising views and becomes more open to others who are not homosexual. The person has a broader view of themselves as a whole person, and defines him-or herself in a more complete way – not just in terms of sexual orientation.*

Simplified and summarised from *Exploring (Homo) Sexuality, A Quick Queer Guide*.  
Triangle Project. Journey of Hope. pp. 7-8.

**A fun resource:**

The diagram below can be enlarged and used to explain the different LGBTI concepts on in a fun way!

