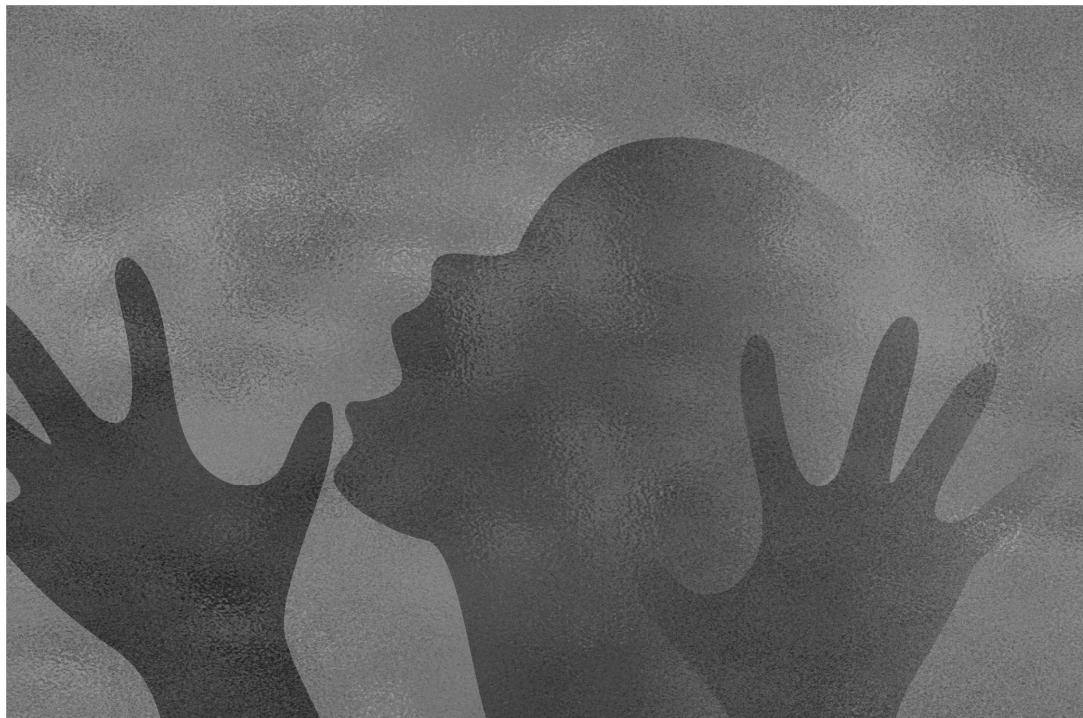


Tool 13:

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



"However divided we may be about this issue, there is one thing we can agree on together: we truly want to be open to hear what the Spirit is saying to us, and to obey the Lord in this as in all matters of faith and life."

Bishop David Russell. 2004, 2011. "The Bible and Homosexuality: What is the Spirit saying to the churches?" P.4

Tool 13 contents

Foreword	240
Acknowledgements	241
Purpose of this Tool.....	241
Preparing our hearts.....	242
Listening for the stories in our lives.....	243
Listening deeply to each other's stories	244
We are all on a journey.....	246
Opening our Minds and Hearts	249
Listening deeply to stories of people with diverse sexual identities and orientations.....	249
What do sexual diversity and gender diversity mean?	252
How do we discern the Truth?	263
Is how we use the Bible consistent with the Spirit of the Gospel of Christ?.....	263
Using the Bible to guide our decisions.....	266
Using the Bible responsibly	271
Using the Bible responsibly to grapple with the hard questions about sexual diversity	272
Developing an inclusive ministry.....	280
Opening Doors: What does an inclusive, affirming faith community look like?	281
Reflecting on our own churches and communities.....	281
Some good news!	283
Empowering ourselves through networking and accessing useful resources.....	287
Becoming Change Agents: The Wheel of Change	289
Practical ideas for creating inclusive and affirming faith communities	289
Being change agents and opening doors	292
Conclusion	294
Resources	294
Attachment 1: Public apology of Exodus International's President	297
Attachment 2: Contextual Bible Study on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19).....	299

Foreword

NCA's commitment to this project arises from its Statement of Principles "*Together for a just world*"(Chapter 2.2).

- "All human beings are embraced by God's love, regardless of religion, culture, gender, sexual orientation, age, functional abilities, ethnicity or political persuasion."
- Chapter 3 states: "*Human dignity is a gift from God and encompasses all humanity from the beginning to the end of life, irrespective of class, gender, religion and ethnicity. God takes a special interest in those who experience poverty, oppression or exclusion* "
- On this theological basis, NCA wants to work with its partners to realise the rights of all people in relation to gender, sexuality and reproductive health.



Acknowledgements

This Tool was written by Daniela Gennrich (PACSA Consultancy Unit, www.pacsa.org.za). Many thanks also to IAM (Inclusive and Affirming Ministries) in Cape Town, for their guidance in its development, and critical reading of the draft MS. Appreciation goes to NCA Team not only for financial support but for leadership, especially Thembani Chamane, the Gender Justice Advisor, for his role on critical inputs, direction and technical support in this production process.

Purpose of this Tool

The Church has a long history of a pastoral ministry, caring for the sick and bringing hope and new life to millions of people over the centuries since Jesus set the ultimate example on earth.

This Tool has been prepared at the request of some churches and Christian Councils in different SADC countries. They are asking many questions about what God is saying about sexuality issues like same-sex relationships.

This is a difficult issue, and stirs up strong emotions.

In fact, globally the issue of same sex relationships has in some cases threatened to break up churches. In countries where it is illegal just to talk about it, it is even more difficult to deal with.

And yet - there are many committed Christians who do not fit into heterosexual norms and are suffering deeply because of rejection by their church, family and friends. Others have lost their faith, become depressed or even committed suicide.

This Tool is designed to help people in churches think deeply about their attitudes and beliefs about diverse forms of sexuality.

It creates space to explore the 8 verses in the Bible that have been used to judge, reject and exclude people who don't fit into the accepted (heterosexual) norms. It does so in a way that opens safe spaces for people to speak out about what they think and feel, to ask questions, and listen to different viewpoints.

But this is not just a 'free-for-all liberal watered-down Gospel'! **Together, we will try to develop criteria to help us discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to us today in a way that is consistent with the Christian understanding of a merciful God, who speaks into human history with love and compassion, and speaks against cruelty, violence and a lack of love.**

Some important words:

Sexuality: Refers to how we live out who we are as sexual beings. This is influenced by how we were born as well as social and cultural influences on our lives.

Sexual orientation: whether one is sexually attracted to members of the opposite or the same sex. One's sexual orientation is part of the core of someone's emotional, psychological, romantic and physical nature – it is usually not just a sexual behaviour choice.

Homosexual: A person who is sexually attracted to members of the same sex. Men attracted to men are often called 'gay', while women attracted to women are called 'lesbian'.

Heterosexual: A person who is sexually attracted to members of what is known as the opposite sex.

The actual picture is much more complex than this. Other terms are defined on pg. 253.

It is important that we think through our sexual ethics so that we are able to respond meaningfully. The Church is called to minister to all people.

The Bible does not give a single clear directive on sexual diversity, or other matters of sexual ethics. In fact, one could use the Bible to prove either point of view. So it challenges us to re-think how we are using the Bible, to remain faithful to its message of God's redemption and inclusion of all people through Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith.

This is not just an issue – it is about people's lives, their relationships and wellbeing. It is about the fruit of our ministries.

Rather than letting it divide us, let us approach this task with humility, admitting our limitations. How do I know I am correctly interpreting God's word for us today? How do you?

You are invited to journey with others as we discern what the Spirit might be saying through God's written word to the Church in a world that is quite different from how it was over the 1 000 year history covered by the Books of the Bible.

This Tool is presented in the spirit of Martin Luther, who approached difficult issues in the 1500s: "*out of love and zeal for truth, and the desire to bring it to light*".

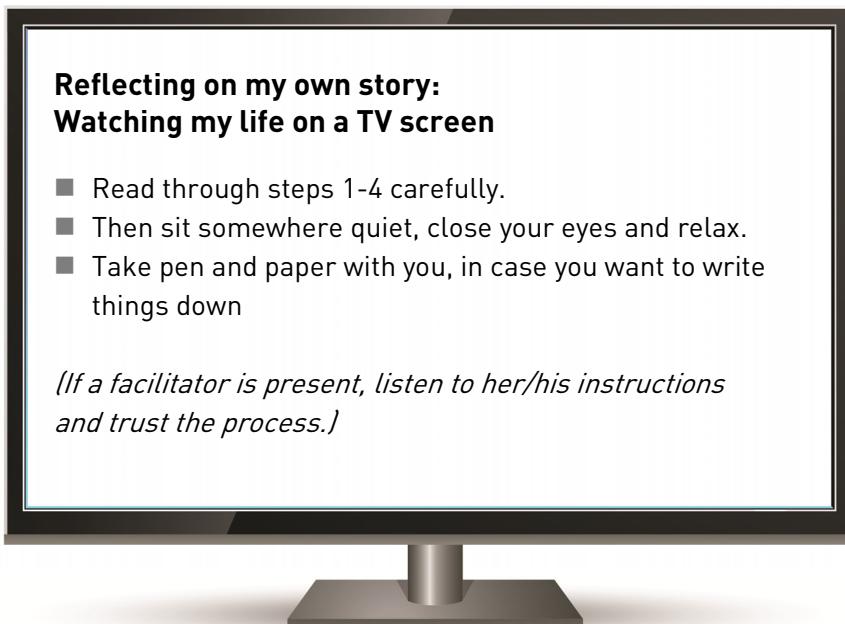
Preparing our hearts

We often read in the Gospel that Jesus' mother, Mary, 'pondered in her heart' what the Angel Gabriel was telling her (Luke 1:29). She needed time and space to reflect on this new thing that God was doing -in her own life, and in human history.

This first activity will help us to open our hearts to what the Holy Spirit is saying in our lives. If you are not used to reflecting on your own – just allow yourself to relax into it, as a form of a prayer.



Listening for the stories in our lives



Gently ponder in your heart:

1. Focus on your breathing:
Pray -
“Lord Jesus Christ [breathe in], have mercy on me [breathe out]”; or
“Lord Jesus Christ [breathe in], thank you that you love me as I am [breathe out]”.
2. Now let your life story play on an imaginary TV screen – just let the images pass in front of your closed eyes:
 - Start with what people have told you about when you were a baby, then go on to what you remember from your early childhood, your teenage years, and all the way up to where you are right now.
 - Try to remember how you FELT as you play back each memory.
 - Don’t stop – let the movie play
3. As soon as you come across a memory where you were in any way EXCLUDED, REJECTED, MISUNDERSTOOD OR DISRESPECTED (for any reason at all) – PRESS ‘PAUSE’, and PONDER:
 - What was happening, and how did you feel about yourself?
 - How did you feel about the other person/s?
 - What did you do?
 - How did the situation end?

Now read through Steps 4 - 6 and continue your reflection process.

4. In the same way, as soon as you come across a memory where you were INCLUDED OR FELT YOU BELONGED – PRESS ‘PAUSE’ AND PONDER:
 - What was happening, and how did you feel about yourself?
 - How did you feel about the other person/s?
 - What did you do?
 - How did the situation end?
5. When you have spent 5-10 minutes thinking about those 2 situations - open your eyes and slowly come back into the room.
6. Now - Looking back:
 - Compare the way you felt in the two experiences.
 - How have these experiences contributed to shaping who you are today?

Listening deeply to each other’s stories



Time to talk: Listening deeply to others’ stories of exclusion and inclusion

Sharing in pairs:

Take turns to answer the first two questions below.

- Talk about how you each felt when you were excluded.
- Talk about how you each felt when you were included.

Listen deeply to your partner as they are sharing something from their life story with you.

Then go on and use the next questions in a conversation to take your reflection further:

- What types of things can make a person feel excluded or included?
- How can experiences of exclusion or rejection as a child affect a person’s life into adulthood?

What is Deep Listening?

It is when we listen deeply to another person, and we focus completely on them and what they are sharing.

We don’t just listen to their words, but their feelings underlying their words.

We do not give advice or make any judgements in response, but just let them know we care, and respect what they are sharing.



Time to talk

Share your thoughts in the bigger group:

- On what basis do people exclude others?
 - How can experiences of exclusion or rejection as a child affect a person's life into adulthood?
- AND -
- How have I personally, or a group or organisation I belong to, excluded or rejected someone?
 - What have I learnt from it, and would I do things differently now?

Then read the stories below together, and talk through the questions that follow in a small group.

Friendship

"When I was in Grade 2, my best friend was Kwabena. He was Ghanaian and I am South African. We were neighbours and loved playing together. One day at break time, one of the boys in Grade 3 that I admired invited me to come and play with him and his friends. I was so excited, and went to play with them. I asked if Kwabena could come too, but they said no. So I went anyway. I felt so proud that they had chosen me.

But after a few days, I felt bad because Kwabena seemed sad. I asked them again if Kwabena could play with us. They said no. They said that if I wanted to be their friend, I was not to play with Kwabena because he was makwere kwere, not South African. I felt so bad. Kwabena was my best friend! I agreed, and played with them every break for a week. But I did not sleep well and worried about him.

Then I decided that I did not want to be their friend if they did not like Kwabena. So I told them that I was still going to be friends with Kwabena, and that I did not want to be friends with boys who made my best friend feel bad. They said nothing. As I walked away, I felt proud that I had stood up for my friend." Ben.

Still not good enough- "Papwa" Sewsunker Sewgolum: One of the top golfers ever to come out of South Africa

"Under pressure, the [apartheid] authorities permitted Sewgolum to play in the Natal Open in 1963 at the famous Durban Country Club, after having been satisfied that apartheid laws would not be broken. "Suitable arrangements" were made for Sewgolum to use a mini-van as a change room, and to have his meals with the black caddies.

Sewgolum did the 'impossible' and won the tournament, and to the eternal disgrace and shame of both the white golfing fraternity and government officials, Sewgolum was not allowed to enter the Durban country club to receive his prize.

A picture of a downcast Sewgolum standing in the rain being handed his trophy through an open window - while the rest of the golfers and officials were warmly ensconced in the clubhouse enjoying the post-game [party] outraged the world and [strengthened] the international movement to boycott apartheid sport." (www.sahistory.org.za/people/sewsunker-039papwa039-sewgolum)

- How do the stories make you feel?
- In what ways are the stories similar to or different from each other?
- How are the stories similar or different from yours?
- Can you think of ways that these kinds of things are still happening in your community or country today?

We are all on a journey

We have seen above that the story of every person's journey is different, and yet we have a lot in common. We have all experienced what it's like not to belong, to be misunderstood or rejected, for whatever reason.

Sometimes we are rejected because of what we have done. But very often it's because of things we cannot do anything about – like our skin colour, or nationality or ethnic background, a disability or the economic standing of the families we are born into. It also often has to do with whether we are men, women or we don't fit into what is seen as 'normal' about what makes a man or a woman.

Prejudice

The main reason why people reject others is that they do not understand them, because they are different.

Most societies in the world throughout history have shown **prejudice** against people that were different from what was considered 'normal' or 'good'.

People often use the Bible to exclude or judge others. But the Gospel message of Jesus is very clear.

He says in John 12:32: "*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*" We are called not to judge – "*Judge not, that you may not be judged*" – (Matthew 7: 1-5), but to love others as we love ourselves (Matthew 22: 36-39). Love, acceptance and respect is really all people want.

Before we listen deeply to the stories of some of us who don't fit into heterosexual norms, let us spend some time reflecting on our own prejudices, and talk about what we want to learn.

What is prejudice?

- a negative judgement or feeling about a person or group without taking time to understand them.

Prejudice often leads to hurtful actions or taking decisions that disadvantage those we see as 'other'.

Everyone has prejudices about someone at some stage in their lives!

What matters is whether we are prepared to address these prejudices.



Time to talk: to judge or not to judge?

Many verses in the Gospels quote Jesus expressly condemning our tendency to judge others who are different from us ([Matthew 7:1-5; Luke 6: 37-42; Luke 12: 14; John 7: 24, 25; John 8: 15]).

But Jesus also said: "... *[W]hy do you not know how to interpret the present time? ...And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?*" (Luke 12: 57)

- What is the difference between judging for ourselves what is right, and judging others?
- Why do you think Jesus tells us to judge what is happening in our time, but spends so much time warning against judging others?
- What does this say about the central message of the Gospel, and how we are meant to be witnesses to it?
- What does it mean for the way we should conduct ourselves as we struggle together to understand what the Holy Spirit is saying to us at this time about sexual diversity?

This Tool as an exploratory journey

Overview

The first part of this Tool is all about ***preparing our hearts*** to be open to what the Holy Spirit might be saying to us at this time.

We already began by **listening** to our own and each other's stories of rejection and exclusion, to prepare our hearts to be open to the experiences of people who do not fit into what the church considers to be 'normal' .

Part 2 helps us to ***open our hearts and minds*** to new information and perspectives.

This Tool begins with a time of **listening deeply** to the stories of people who have felt included or excluded because of their sexuality, and tries to **discern** how God would want us to respond to them. It also provides a space to listen to the **different voices and opinions** on this subject, so everyone can make up their own minds.

There is some **input** to help clear up any confusion about **terminology** and to make sense of the most important **variations** in sexual and gender identity, and sexual orientation.

It then goes on to explore some of the challenges of interpreting the few **Biblical references** that underpin most churches' teachings on homosexuality and sexual diversity.

The last part aims to **empower** us with access to further resources and **networks** that can help us live out a ministry of inclusion for all God's people.

It ends with a conversation about **what all this means for us in practice** – it provides a list of organisations and resources, and offers some ideas for action – to become change **agents** in our churches and in our lives. The idea is that we can all contribute to **opening the doors** of our churches to include all people, as they are.



Time to talk: creating a safe space

On your own, try to answer the following questions honestly:

1. Do I have enough knowledge about homosexuality and diverse sexual and gender identities?
2. Do I really understand what it means to be gay, lesbian, transgender or intersex?
3. Have I already made up my mind about people whose sexuality is different from mine, and how does this influence the way I read the Bible?
4. Where and how did I learn about homosexuality and different forms of sexual identity?
5. Do I know enough to form a respectful and informed opinion?



Time to talk: what do we want to learn?

Together in a small group, talk about:

- What you would like to learn from this Tool about homosexuality and diverse sexual identities?
(If you have a facilitator, they will try to include these things as they plan your sessions.)
- What would make you feel safe enough to be honest about how you feel, what you want to know and who you are?

For example –

- Is it OK to interrupt each other?
- Do you prefer to debate the issues, and see who wins, or dialogue with each other to learn about the issues together?
- Are you happy for others to talk about what you share when you all leave this space?

Discussion, Debate or Dialogue?

In a discussion, people usually argue their points and try to convince the other/s that they are right. In a conversation or dialogue, we listen deeply to each other's stories and ideas to learn from them. We do not try to correct them, advise them or make them see things our way.

When you agree, make a list of these and use them as the norms or rules for your group- and don't be shy to call someone to order if you feel they are not respecting these norms.



Opening our Minds and Hearts

Listening deeply to stories of people with diverse sexual identities and orientations

Read through the following stories together, and then talk about them, using the questions below to guide your conversation.

My Journey

"Growing up, I did not feel it was wrong at all to feel the way that I felt about boys I had a crush on. ...I did not 'know' that I was gay because no one had told me that I was.

In the 7th Grade I made a personal decision to follow Jesus and become his disciple. I was very excited and anxious to see what the journey ahead looked like. One of the first rules my church made clear to young people is NO DATING! You must be holy and separate yourself from the unclean things. ... Being the good Christian boy, I followed suit. I did not masturbate, date anyone and I certainly did not have sex. I fled from all such sexual 'impurities'.

"Why why why do I have to be killed for loving someone? Why why why?"

Zanele Muholi

When I got to Bible College my journey reached its peak as I met another bible scholar who ... 'struggled' with the same struggle. We would pray and fast together about our homosexual desires. ... After a while my guilt would not allow me to remain silent any longer. ... At the fear of being thrown out of Bible College, I confessed all that I have been 'wrestling' with and told the Dean of the College how I wanted to be set free from the bondage of homosexuality. I could not fight anymore. I was taken through many processes of what might be called 'reparative therapy': I attended Christian counselling sessions, I went to camps and retreats to get me 'right', I took communion, I read my Bible, I prayed, I fasted... A Christian counsellor referred me to Exodus International Ministries website ... - a Christian ex-gay organisation which claimed to have helped many LGBTI people become 'normal' again. ... All to no avail. ...I was still attracted to other men.

Later in my theological studies the reality dawned on me that being a gay Christian was not going to change. I scrutinised the scriptures in search of some sort of meaning for my life. I was grappling with reconciling my spirituality with my sexuality, and pondered whether I could be called to ministry and be gay at the same time?

I disqualified myself from ministry to others because I had felt that God hated me and had rejected me. Why was I in pursuit of a God who had rejected me, whose Church rejects me and even theological reflection about God was not inclusive of me? It was in this dry place in my spirituality that I began to find a refreshing source of life, and it was not in the scriptures.



On 19 June 2013 Alan Chambers, President of Exodus International Ministries⁹¹ announced that the Ministry was officially shutting down. They made a public apology to all those 'sexual others' who have been hurt in the process of the 'exodus'. After that, I resolved in my heart never to turn back.

I am what I am by the grace of God. I have no doubt ...that I am created in God's image. I am not a defect and neither is my sexuality a hindrance to my spirituality. ...The two cannot be separated.

I came out to my pastors in January this year. They are convinced that I am deceived and have accepted an evil spirit, ... so I need help and deliverance. My pastors told me to go back and pray about this matter and come back to them.... After a few months in prayer, I returned to them and informed them that I still feel the same-sex attraction. My senior pastor told me never to set foot in the church ever again.

I have recently started discovering my calling. I work for an organisation called Inclusive and Affirming Ministries. I am working towards ordination as clergy within the Metropolitan Community Churches.

I am also engaged to be married to my same sex partner and we are in the process with our families to get married in the very near future." Arnold Motsau

Attacked for being lesbian

"Noxolo Nkosana was stabbed four times while she was getting out of a car on Friday night, returning to my home in Crossroads, when two men ... approached.

*"They called to me, but I didn't respond. Then they said: 'Hey you! F**king tomboy!' I kept quiet. When I looked back, one of them was coming for me. He stabbed me twice in the back and I fell down. While my partner was screaming, they stabbed me two more times."...*

Her neighbours said she deserved what she got. But Mandla Zolekile, a father of 5, said that, though he would throw his child out of the house if she were a lesbian, lesbians should not be attacked. He said: 'It's a democratic country, What they choose to do with their lives is their problem.'" (The Times, 14 June 2011)

No Space for Transgender Patient

"I had an asthma attack and was admitted to a female ward. I was comfortable with this. The next day, the nurses and doctors wanted to discharge me, saying I was in the wrong ward. Alternatively, they would place me in a separate wing of the male ward, which I didn't want. Fearing for my safety, I alerted the media, TIA and Iranti-org. My case was then reconsidered by the hospital management, and I was allowed to remain in the female ward. Most people don't complain because they are afraid and this way people are denied their right to health."

Snowy Mamba⁹²

"There's this man part in me. ... Outside there's just the feminine. But I could say where my heart is based, where my soul is based, there's that man spirit that lives in me."

Nkunzi NKabinde,
transgender man

⁹¹ An extract from the announcement of Exodus Ministries and Alan Chambers' apology can be found in Attachment 1.
⁹² Outreach Officer for Transgender Intersex Africa (TIA). In *Report of Activities, Transgender Day of Remembrance 2014. Social Dialogue on Transgender Learners in the South African Education System*. 20 November 2014, Constitution Hill

Zach Avary's story

*"When he was 3, my son said to me "I am a girl". I assumed he was just going through a phase, and left it at that. But then...he would get upset if anyone referred to him as a boy. ... [H]e used to cry and try to cut off his penis. ... A child psychologist identified **gender identity disorder**. His primary school has supported the family, telling other pupils that Zach felt he was a girl trapped in a boy's body."* (Victoria Ward, quoting Zach's mother. Happy being a girl. The Times March 12 2012.)

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

Denis Nzioka Kenyan
LGBTI activist

I am an African

"My name is Lukas Mukongo. I am a 30 year-old African gay man. I was born in a small village called Ohongo in the northern part of Namibia, Oshiwambo culture. My family are Christians of the Catholic Church.

I became an active church member when I was 14 years old and in school. I became a Sunday school teacher and altar boy. This was challenging because I started looking at boys and realising that I had feelings for them. In the village I lived, we had no access to information, not even radios, so I did not know what the feelings meant.

I always wanted to come out and tell my Priest who I am, but he kept on postponing our appointment. When I finally cornered him, he advised me not to tell anyone ... he was afraid that the community may lose their trust in me and that it could affect my responsibilities in the church. Oshiwambo culture does not allow a gay person to enter the church. My culture believes that it is un-African to be homosexual.

It was important for me to tell my mother that I was gay. The Priest went with me. I openly talked about it and the news spread to the rest of the community.

I chose to stay in the church and the church people allowed me. It was my good behaviour, leadership in church, integrity and taking part in uplifting my community that made it easy for them to accept me as gay.

I am an African and I ask that we stand together and work for our God."
Lukas Mukongo.

There was an international outcry when this Malawian gay couple were jailed after they announced their engagement. They were sentenced to 14 years, charged with '*carnal knowledge against the order of nature*'. The massive global campaign led to their release. Their relationship ended, and Tiwonge Chimbangala, who is a transgender woman, moved to South Africa. She expected a 'safe haven', but abuses continue daily and she has not found work. She has applied to the UN to be moved to a third country. This may have been a success for LGBTI rights in Africa, but for the individuals involved, the daily struggle to find peace continues.

THE NATION
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GAYS ENGAGE

FAST FACTS

- Homosexuality, referred to under "offences against morality" in the Penal Code sections 153 and 156, carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment or five or 14 years imprisonment, respectively, with or without corporal punishment.
- Through its HIV/AIDS and Nutrition in OPC Mary Showa recently urged for inclusion of gays in the fight against HIV, in the same manner government has done with other minorities, even if it is not legally recognised in Malawi.

CAROLINE SOMANIE
Steve Recovers

Gay lovebirds Tiwonge Chimbangala and Steven Monjola on Saturday made history by becoming the first Malawians to spiced their festive season with an HIV-positive chikhwowe, the first recorded public activity for homosexuals in the country. The ceremony was held at the Chikhwowe Lodge in the city and witnessed by scores of spectators. Clad in traditional matching outfits, the couple just went about their business as others threw a few coins at them. Initially, the couple just went about their business as others followed the programme. Tiwonge, the bride, was a brother of activity as people pushed and shoved to take a glimpse at Tiwonge and Steven during the rare occasion.

Monjola says he is happy that the couple just went about their business as others followed the programme. Tiwonge, the bride, was a brother of activity as people pushed and shoved to take a glimpse at Tiwonge and Steven during the rare occasion.

Some KA locals link quotes to Kayisekwa, T/A Kolongo in trouble —Netilesel 2

Kwambwa calls government to urgently act on health service delivery, People's Parliament P4

Milonbwa says Malawians now supporting local businesses —Business 9

Source: THE NATION, 28 December 2009

Sipho's Longing

"A couple of weeks ago I was counselling a young guy who grew up in Soweto, Johannesburg. Sipho had read about our church in the gay magazine, Exit, but as he sat in my office, his deep-seated fear of a revengeful God caused him to sob uncontrollably as he told me his story. We chatted for a long time before I offered to pray with him. Sipho shared with me his intense longing to find a God who would truly understand him, and towards the end of our conversation, he looked up at me, his eyes and cheeks still wet from weeping, and asked in a hesitant, soft voice: "So what you're saying to me, Pastor, is that God loves me?" Elise van Wyk. Miriam Dancing ... women who love women. 2009. Aqua, Simon's Town

"I'm too churchy for the gays, but too gay for the church, so I'm often lonely."
Arnold Motsau



Time to talk: listening deeply to people's stories who do not fit heterosexual norms

- How do the stories make you feel?

Choose one or two of the stories that really had an impact on you, and talk about them using the following questions:

- Who were the different role players – how do you think they felt and what did they do?
- What were the consequences of their actions?
- What could they have done differently, and how would this have changed the ending?
- How was the story similar or different from other stories of prejudice and exclusion?
- How is the story similar or different from yours?
- How do you think the church should relate to people who are different in their sexual identity or orientation?

What do sexual diversity and gender diversity mean?

To try to understand this term, let us unpack three words:

- **Diversity** a range of different types of things, or people. It is the opposite of uniformity – everyone being the same. Another word for it is **variety**.
- **Sexual** refers to the obvious biological distinction between female and male – e.g. women have a vagina and breasts, men a penis.
- **Gender** is about how an individual feels about their identity – as a man, a woman, or a combination of these. UNESCO (2000, 6) defines the word gender as follows: "Gender refers to the social differences and relations between men and women which are learned, vary widely among societies and cultures, and change over time."



A common term for the different types of sexual diversity is LGBTI. It stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.



Time to talk: helping each other to understand the concepts

Read through the table below together, and feel free to ask questions about anything that is not clear to you. Try to think of examples in your own life or people that you know.

LGBTI explained

Sex (Sexual identity)	Gender Identity	Sexual Orientation
<p>Refers to our sexual biological makeup, which is determined by our chromosomes (DNA), hormones and sexual organs.</p> <p>Female – breasts and vagina</p> <p>Male – penis and deeper voice</p> <p>Intersex –organs of both male and female (e.g. both testicles and ovaries; or a penis and a vagina)</p> <p>All humans have different combinations of both male and female hormones: women tend to have more female hormones, while men tend to have more male hormones. Intersex people's hormone balance is less obviously towards one or other sex. This balance is not always the same in a person – sometimes a person will have a different balance. E.g. a pregnant woman will have more oestrogens during pregnancy.</p> <p>In the past in some societies, parents have decided their intersex child's sex at birth, and doctors have removed organs that do not 'fit' with the parents' preference.</p> <p>But more recently, parents are being encouraged to wait until their child is old enough to tell them whether they identify themselves as a boy or a girl before trapping their child in a body that they do not identify with (transgender).</p>	<p>Refers to how a person identifies themselves (e.g. their behaviour, dress, roles in the family or society) – more as a male or more as a female.</p> <p>Most men identify with the roles and behaviour, of biological males, and most women identify themselves with those of females.</p> <p>Man – male</p> <p>Woman - female</p> <p>Transgender - people whose biological sexual identity does not fit comfortably with their psychological gender identity.</p> <p>E.g. Someone who is a male physically might feel and act more like a woman than a man (called a trans woman); or a biological woman may feel and act more like a man (called a trans man). Often, though not always, such a person is not happy to be seen as what their biology dictates (gender dysphoria).</p> <p>Many transgendered people take hormones of the sex they identify with, to help them feel more comfortable in their bodies. Some (if they can afford it) may have sexual re-assignment surgery, which changes their sex organs into that of the sex they identify with. Some people use the term transsexual, but this can be hurtful, and it is more respectful to call such a person whatever sex they have become: a woman or a man.</p>	<p>Refers to a person's lasting emotional, romantic, physical or sexual feelings of attraction to others.</p> <p>Heterosexual – to what is known as the opposite sex</p> <p>Homosexual – to the same sex (gay men, lesbian women)</p> <p>Bisexual – to both sexes (not usually at the same time, or as strongly to both). It depends on the individual.</p> <p>True and false homosexuality:</p> <p>Someone with a homosexual orientation (who has lasting homosexual feelings and attractions) is not the same as someone who practices homosexual sex at some stage in their lives (e.g. children experimenting, prisoners, forced or exploitative homosexual sex, or homosexual raping as a Tool of war.) <i>A true homosexual's sexual orientation is part of who they are as a person, and is not just a choice they make (and can choose against later).</i></p>

There are also many non-conforming people who behave in ways that are not expected of people with their biological sex. For example, some men like to dress in a more feminine way or engage in activities that society usually expects of women. Some women like to dress in a more masculine way or engage in activities society expects of men.

In other words, there are many ways that people think about themselves and express their sexuality; not just as 'pure' woman or 'pure' man.

Is this all just a new fashion?

Research shows that homosexuality and gender diversity have existed throughout history and across cultures.

There is evidence that other mammals also have a small percentage of individuals who do not fit into the heterosexual norms. Some genetic and neurological research is showing that there may be biological links to gender identity and sexual orientation.

Nothing conclusive has been found yet, but there is a lot of evidence that programmes that claim to cure or rectify people who do not fit heterosexual norms, have not succeeded.

The overwhelming majority of people claim that their sexual identity is not something they can do anything about, but is an essential part of who they are.

Many researchers⁹³ say that no one is 'purely' male or 'purely' female. We are all a mixture of male and female hormones, and we do not all act in the way that society expects a woman or a man to behave. For example many girl children love climbing trees and running around, while many boys prefer to sit and read or play gentler games. Different societies have different norms or rules for what is OK and what is not.

Once a person crosses a boundary of what is seen as 'normal', they often find themselves judged as abnormal, 'weird' or gay, or as children- naughty.

Some people believe that homosexuality is a mental illness, but there is no scientific basis for this. The World Health Organisation declassified homosexuality as an illness or disorder in 1990, but there is still a widespread perception that there is something unnatural about it.

However, many people recognise that there is a link between the mental health of LGBTI people and how they are being treated. It is, of course, normal for anyone who is excluded, teased, raped or judged as evil to be confused and depressed! Such a person may do anything they can to change themselves just to be acceptable to those they care about - even denying who they are. And this can cause deep emotional turmoil.

Many Africans believe homosexuality is an 'import' from the West. But a report by the Academy of Sciences of South Africa "Diversity in Human Sexuality: Implications for Policy in Africa"⁹⁴ shows that there are as many homosexuals (about 5%, or 1 in every 20 people) in all countries, including African countries.

Despite all the new information available, many people still believe that being gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex is unnatural or abnormal. Some even believe that all homosexuals are

⁹³ <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-06-11-un-african-sex-myths-exploded>

⁹⁴ Cited in <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-06-11-un-african-sex-myths-exploded>

sex offenders or child abusers. This worldwide study shows that there is absolutely NO evidence for this, in fact most sex offenders are heterosexual. Many people hide their true identity for fear of losing their families, jobs or even being chased out of their religious group or church



Time to talk: understanding types of sexual diversity

Read through the following short stories:

- Decide on the kind of sexual or gender diversity that is being expressed.
- Talk about what you think might have been the main challenges each person faced in their lives as they tried to come to terms with their sexuality and gender identity.

*"When I was 5 years old, I hid in our spare bathroom and tried to wee standing up.... When my mother [caught me, she looked at me with] absolute fury and disgust.... But I was a tomboy. I despised Barbie. I liked guns....[Recently] I figured out why the notion of me being a girl/woman freaked me out so much... I'm not a woman. But I'm not a man either." (Demelza Bush. 2015. *I am genderqueer – comfortable with my identity at last*. In Mail and Guardian. April 1-16 2015, pp. 26-27)*

"[I] was inspired to embrace my truth after the December 2014 suicide of Leelah Alcorn, the ... teen whose ... gender identity was rejected by her family. For a while I dismissed the fact that I hated my body. I pretended to be content with what I was assigned, until at a certain point I broke. I went through a series of horrible breakdowns... I knew I wasn't happy, but it didn't seem fair to me that everyone else around me was. They didn't spend all their time thinking about how much they hated being categorised as a woman. ... I am no longer Mia. I never really was. And now I stand before you in my true and authentic gender identity. As Tom. I stand before you as a 13-year-old boy." (Tom Sosnik. 2015. Taken from a post by Mamba Writer. March 18, 2015. In HEADLINES, Mambagirl News)

"If any other group of individuals was forced to live with such fear and stigma, the international community would surely unite in condemnation."

Navi Pillay, UN:
Discrimination against LGBTIs just as irrational as racism, in Mail & Guardian,
16 May, 2014

*"When, in August 1984, I told Henri that I was gay, he was very kind, very understanding but very un-self-revealing about his own struggle. Within a year, however, he was seeking my help with his struggle over the same issue. In this process, Henri didn't 'misbehave', nor was he 'scandalous'. He was an honest searcher who tried to operate out of a deep integrity as he explored this part of himself which terrified him." Michael Ford 2000. *Wounded Prophet, A Portrait of Henri J M Nouwen*⁹⁵, London: Darton, Longman and Todd.*

⁹⁵ Henri Nouwen was a Catholic Priest, professor and writer, who wrote over 40 books and sold over 7 million copies. His love for God and his deep spirituality have inspired the faith walk of hundreds of thousands of Christians throughout the world. He died at the age of 64, some say of a broken heart. His last works revealed a lifelong struggle with his homosexuality, but he never broke his vow of chastity or publicly declared himself homosexual. His diary entry Fri 29th Sept 1996 (just 3 weeks before he died of a massive heart attack) read: "There is a huge gap between my internalised homophobia (hatred of homosexuals) and my increasing conviction that homosexuality is not a curse but a blessing for our society." Published in 1998: *Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of his final year*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.

What is 'normal' in the world and in churches?

Homosexuality is illegal in 76 countries across the globe, and punishable by death in 7.

It is illegal in 38 of Africa's 54 countries (punishable by death in 4).

(3) The State may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

(4) No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection (3). National legislation must be enacted to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination.

Extract from Section 9 of the South African Constitution

South Africa is the only African country whose Constitution protects the rights of sexual minorities, and yet it is the country where the concept of 'corrective rape' was coined. [Many people would ask - how can rape correct anything?]

Almost all church denominations in South Africa currently consider homosexuality to be a sin, although their responses vary. Some have begun to engage in open debates about the issue, but even those who allow gay clergy (such as the Anglican Church in Southern Africa), add that they may not practise their sexual orientation or get married.

This shows that **sexual diversity is certainly not socially accepted** in most parts of the world, and people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) are unable to live or worship freely. In many cases they live in fear of arrest, verbal or physical attack, loss of employment, exclusion from their church, or even legal prosecution and/or violent death.

And yet there are also many voices all over the world that are uniting to shout NO!

We cannot claim to be a civilised society and turn a blind eye to the attack and murder of gays and lesbians.

Many NGOs are working together to advocate against laws that criminalise homosexuality. And, while only a few churches are beginning to reflect deeply about what God requires of Christians at this time in human history – a number of inclusive churches have been mushrooming all over the world⁹⁶. They embrace all people, regardless of their sexual identity or orientation, and help them integrate their love for God and their sexual identity and orientation.

"We who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another."
(Romans 12: 5)

⁹⁶ E.g. The Metropolitan Community Churches, which exist all over the world. Go to www.mccchurch.org.za/ to find their branches.

Sifting through the different voices

This section quotes from different people's opinions, and allows space for us to make up our own minds.



Time to talk: TAXI-TAXI!



Source: wikimedia.org

Talk about any of the comments or dialogues below that interest you.

This game helps groups to learn from each other and think through their own taken-for-granted attitudes more deeply.

- Read through each set of statements carefully, and spend some time reflecting on them:
 - How do they make you feel?
 - Which of the voices makes more sense to you, and why?

As a group:

Pretend you are all on a journey. (You are actually - on a journey to discover God's truth for each of your lives and ministries.)

You are at a minibus taxi rank, waiting for your taxi. There are two or three going in your direction.

Decide which of the statements below you would like to talk about more (or your facilitator can decide on your behalf).

- For each set of statements, decide which one you agree or identify with most.
- When you have decided, each group of passengers has a chance to explain (without interruption or comments) which one they identify with most.
- Then spend some time talking about the points that have been raised by others, and share any further questions that may still be bothering you.

NOTE: This is NOT A DEBATE, and there are NO WINNERS OR LOSERS. The idea is not to try to convince others that your view is right! The idea is to listen to different points of view.

Anyone may, however, change their mind and get out of their taxi and get into one of the others.





"Homosexuality is a choice."

No one chooses sexuality. I didn't choose my sexuality. If I had a chance actually I would wish to go back to my mum's womb and come out heterosexual because the harassment... is really too much. "Kasha Jacqueline



"Who ... would choose to be lesbian or gay where we are told that being gay is ungodly? People do not choose to be born black or white... Who [would say] 'I have decided to be a lesbian from tomorrow; I have decided not to be straight any longer'? We are who we are. It is a fact of life. "Lesego Magwai



"I love the sinner, but hate the sin. God requires me to admonish a brother that has fallen into the sin of homosexuality." Pastor at a Pietermaritzburg Minister's Fraternal.



"Ask me how I live. Talk to me and I will tell you, how do I relate to my God, the God you talk about so much, before you go proclaiming me as a sinner." Victor Juliet Mukasa.



"Homosexuality is un-African" Jon Qwelane



"The [main] argument that they use is that homosexuality is against the Bible. It is unchristian... [I]t's ironical because in fact what's alien is the religion that they base their argument on. That is alien to Africa. That was brought in our society... from Europe, from outside. Homosexuality, on the other hand, has always been part and parcel of our society like any other society where you find human beings." Dr Sylvia Tamale.

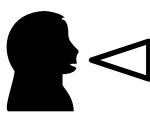


"It is just a phase!"



"I immediately told my mom, and she reacted extremely negatively, telling me that it was a phase, that I would never truly be a girl, that God doesn't make mistakes, that I am wrong. "If you are reading this, parents, please don't tell this to your kids. ...That won't do anything but make them hate them self. That's exactly what it did to me.... Either I live the rest of my life as a lonely man who wishes he were a woman or I live my life as a lonelier woman who hates herself. There's no winning. There's no way out." Extract from Leelah Alcorn's suicide note, Dec. 2014.





"Most gays have some hurt from the past that has driven them to it. I know someone who was healed. We should pray for homosexuals to be released from this demon." [Church member]



"How can I be cured from being who I am?" Anonymous



"God knew definitely that I would be a homosexual maybe before I was born, so I believe God likes me the way I am." Samuel Ganafa



"More than anything, I am sorry that so many have interpreted this religious rejection by Christians as God's rejection. I am profoundly sorry that many have walked away from their faith and that some have chosen to end their lives."⁹⁷



"People who go around defending homosexuals need to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show them if they have a hidden sin themselves."

Pastor at a Pietermaritzburg ministers fraternal meeting



"I just don't believe it's a problem for God. And yet it's been made into a huge problem by the churches ... The sin of too many Christians... is that there is a huge reluctance to listen, an avoidance. And that, I think, is a sin." Bishop David Russell.



"Call me names, but gay is NOT okay..."

[Jon Qwelane. 20th July 2008. Sunday Sun.]



"Homosexuality is abnormal."



"Why did God, who created the endless sky and countless living things, make me a homosexual? God loves all things He created. But what about me? What about other homosexuals? I have realised I was wrong [to think I am a mistake], and God loves me whether I am homosexual or not. Finally I found inner peace." Anonymous



⁹⁷ Alan Chambers, 20th June 2013. President of Exodus Ministries, when he closed the organisation which had spent 37 years offering 'a healing ministry' to homosexuals, with a public apology to the LGBT community.



"Genesis 2 clearly states that God ordained that marriage is between one woman and one man."

"By God's grace I have met a wonderful person, Amanda. ...I have discovered that by denying my sexuality, I denied a significant part of myself, my God-given means of connecting and loving another human being. This relationship has brought us both much joy and pleasure and companionship... We are committed to being respectful, faithful, caring and trustworthy. Our desire has been to honour God and so we are celebrating our love relationship by getting married..." Ecclesia



"Most gays and lesbians have bad relationships with their parents. "

"Gogo Lizzy lived with her late granddaughter Phumeza, a lesbian, in Nyanga East. One night, their front door was kicked open and an unknown man rushed inside the house with a gun in his hand. Without saying a word he shot Phumeza and she died instantly. Gogo accepts it was the way she lived her life. Gogo Lizzy is a great supporter of LGBTI and attends all our functions including the Pride March. The person who shot Phumeza was never arrested." Bulelwa Panda



"Gays and lesbians should not have children, because they may also become that way." Church member

"There is no evidence from adoption agencies that children with homosexual parents are damaged. Love, not heterosexuality can guarantee a happy family life." Bishop David Russell, 4 January 2011, Cape Times



"Parents let's take care of our lesbian kids"
Source: IAM





Time to talk: When we really listen

- Have you ever had a conversation with a gay, lesbian, intersex or transgender person, and listened deeply to what their lives are like? What have been your thoughts and feelings as you have listened?
- If not, how has what you have read above affected you?
- How have you felt about your own sexuality?
- How should the church respond to people who do not fit into the accepted norms?
- What are some questions you are still sitting with?

Our thoughts and voices have consequences

Some people say that their opinions about sexual diversity are personal, and so don't do any harm.

But when different people's views come together there can be bigger consequences, for individuals as well as whole groups.

Let us look at two examples.

The first example comes from South Africa's history.

In the 1990's in apartheid South Africa, a doctor called Aubrey Levin believed that homosexuality was a human perversion.

He ran a project for the SA Defence Force called 'The Aversion Project'. It involved taking gays and lesbians and performing shock therapy on them (now an illegal medical practice used in the past for correcting psychiatric disorders).

He and his team also performed forced sexual reassignment (which they called 'sex change') surgery on them, and drove them out into the streets without the hormonal treatment to support their new sexual identity -which many of them did not want anyway, as they were homosexuals and not transgender.

This project has been widely recognised as a massive human rights violation.

Van Zyl, de Gruchy, Lapinsky, Lewin, Reid. 1999. The Aversion Project Human rights abuses of gays and lesbians in the SADF by health workers during the apartheid era. Cape Town. Simply Said and Done.

The second example comes from Uganda.

"There's harm done by the idea that Africa is exempt from [having homosexuals amongst its population]. It allows lawmakers to treat the problems of people who are in fact their citizens and members of their communities as though they are an external threat.... [Museveni wrote in] a letter to the Ugandan Parliament: "The question at the core of the debate on homosexuality is: What do we

do with an abnormal person? Do we kill him/her? Do we imprison him/her? Or we do contain him/her?" Sarah Wild. Un-African' sex myths explode. Mail and Guardian, 12th June 2015.



Time to talk: One thought, one action, many consequences

- What kinds of consequences do you think our thoughts and actions can have (positive or negative):
 - for homosexual people in or outside of churches?
 - for the churches' witness in the world?
 - for society as a whole?

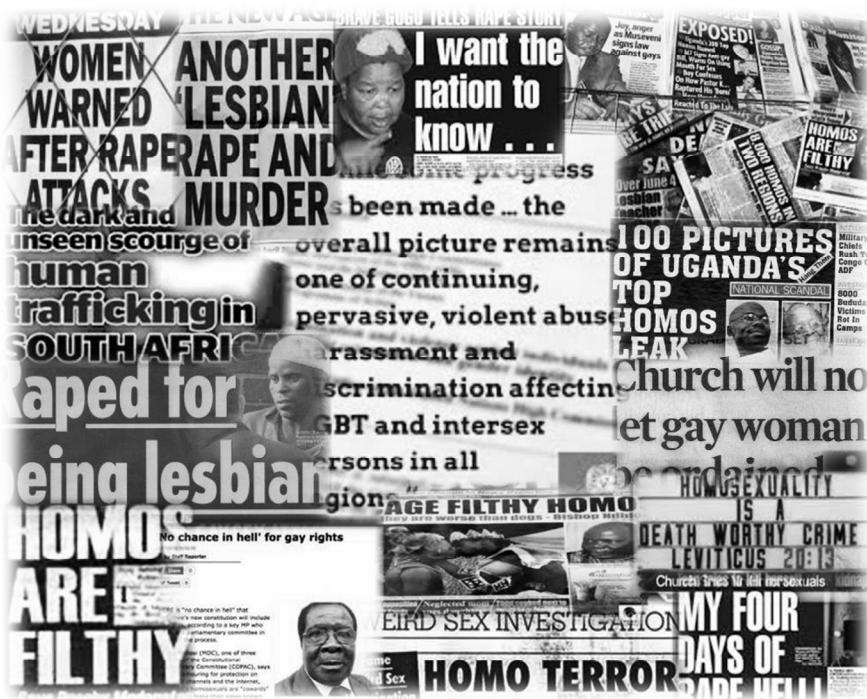
"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10)

Perhaps the important question to ask ourselves is this:

- Is what I believe life-affirming or life-denying?
- Is it consistent with the Biblical recognition of the dignity of all human beings as created in the image of God?
- And does it contribute towards building a common humanity, a society built on Ubuntu?



In Nazi Germany, many homosexuals were persecuted, whether they were Jewish or not. Jewish gays had to wear the emblem above, and German gays were forced to wear a pink triangle. The pink triangle has become a mark of 'gay pride'.



How do we discern the Truth?

Reading all the many opinions and hearing the Bible used in a variety of ways, can be very confusing. It can even lead to some people losing their faith in God, and believing there is no such thing as 'truth'.

To take this question further, let us explore a bit more about how human beings relate to truth.



Time to talk: What is the Truth?

Try this as a group:

Go and stand outside somewhere, and stand where you all look in the same direction.

Each person makes a circle with their thumb and forefinger, and puts it to one eye. With the other eye closed, each one should tell the others what they are seeing. Then all open both eyes and look at the whole scene. Share what you see now.

Talk about:

- Who was right about what they were seeing?
- Were the things each person saw real or not?
- Would there have been much point in arguing about who was right about what they saw?
- When you all looked at the whole picture, was it easier to agree on what you were seeing?

Have you got the whole picture?

- Once you have completed the exercise, given by the facilitator, talk about your reflection on it:
 - What is the Truth? Can anyone claim to know the whole Truth? What influences our perception of the Truth?
 - What is the value of listening to other people's insights on our own journeys to discern the Truth for our own lives, by sharing our different understandings of Scripture?
 - How does this affect your approach when working together with others to discern what the Spirit of God might be saying to each of us through the Bible and through this Tool?

Is how we use the Bible consistent with the Spirit of the Gospel of Christ?

"Test all things; hold fast to what is good." (Thessalonians 5: 21)

We have been listening deeply to stories of how people of diverse sexualities have suffered rejection by the church and society as a whole.

The Bible contains over 31 173 verses. Only 8 verses have been used by people to condemn homosexuality, but 100s refer to judgement as a sin.
What does that tell us?

How was the Bible written?
The Bible is a collection of stories and other books.

The Bible is actually a library (literal meaning of *Biblio*) of books, written at different times in history.

Some are historical stories of people's journeys with God – not that different from our own stories we shared earlier.

Others offer wisdom, and still others (mostly in the Old Testament) offer lists of rules for behaviour.

The books were written down by many different people (men) who wrote in the languages of their day and were influenced by their cultural context.

But long before anything was written down, the stories, rules and words of wisdom had been passed down for generations by word of mouth.

Biblical historians have researched the origins of all the different books, and this has helped us to understand them better.

The **challenge** is to also listen deeply to what the Bible is saying, and to **understand it for ourselves** rather than depending on others to interpret it for us. And for church leaders, the challenge is to recognise that people depend on you for interpreting Scripture in ways that will speak life into their lives.

We have said above that the Bible does not have a single clear position on many life issues, and only contains very few direct references to homosexual practices. People on both sides of the argument tend to quote from the Bible support their points of view.

Clergy and church people often quote the few verses in the Bible to prove that homosexuality is wrong and against God's will, and to exclude homosexuals or pray for their deliverance or healing.

On the other hand, there are clergy and church people who have quoted from the Bible to argue that homosexuality and sexual diversity should not be condemned, and that the Church should develop a more inclusive ministry.

Let us now accept the challenge to look again at some of the Bible verses with fresh eyes in a spirit of humility.

Christians believe that the Bible is our ultimate standard of faith, and that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2Timothy3:16). But there are many different views on exactly what this means in practice, and how we should interpret the Bible.

Different ways people understand the authority of The Bible

- Some believe that God actually breathed God's Word through the men who wrote down the exact words dictated by God;
- Others say that ordinary people of faith, who were inspired by God's Spirit, interpreted the age-old stories and wisdom through their personal experiences in their cultures and societies, and wrote them down in their own language/s.

Christians read the Bible for 3 reasons:

- to encounter Jesus;
- to grow in their faith, by understanding the story of God's plan for salvation in Jesus;
- to obtain guidance for daily life by understanding the values and Gospel norms that we are to live by, by God's grace.

(Bishop David Russell, 2004, 2011)

Different ways to read the Bible:

How we understand the Bible's origins influences how we approach it.

As readers, we are influenced by the limitations of our own upbringing, experiences and the time in history in which we live - in the same way that the writers were influenced.

This is why it is important to be humble when reading the Bible. Neither the writer nor the reader can have a total grasp of the full Truth of God.

The two main ways of reading the Bible work with these limitations differently:

Literal interpretation: People take specific verses and apply them word for word to any situation, at all times. They believe that the words are unchanging because they are the actual 'Words of God' breathed through different writers.

Contextual (hermeneutic) interpretation⁹⁸: People believe the Bible has been inspired, but not dictated, by God. They do not read isolated verses and try to apply them directly to their lives for all times.

Rather, they try to understand whole passages more deeply:

- in the light of the rest of the story or other related stories, letters or poetic texts (literary context);
- by taking time to understand the kind of society that existed at the time when the passage was written (historical context) ; and
- thinking deeply about the issues in their own society, and using whatever scientific and other knowledge they can use to help them understand what the Bible might mean in today's world (current context).

Contextual Bible study is a useful tool for contextual biblical interpretation. It is best done in groups rather than alone, as the insights of other participants can open up the deeper meaning of texts in relation to current social realities. It is also done prayerfully and with humility, based on the understanding that no one of us is able to see the whole Truth of God, and our understanding is influenced by our life experience and our own limited vision.

The moral dynamics of Scripture⁹⁹ and the importance of dialogue

One thing that can be confusing is that **the Bible often seems to contradict itself.**

This is why it is **useful to read it in community**, as we can learn from each other.

⁹⁸ Contextual Bible study (www.ujamaa.org.za) is a useful tool for contextual interpretation. It is not a totally new way to approach reading the Bible, and it is not just a way to water down the Word of God. A similar approach has been used for thousands of years by Jewish rabbis, to try and make sense of difficult texts in the *Torah* (Jewish Scriptures) in the light of current social realities. In Jewish tradition it was called *Midrash*. Midrash accepts that any text has multiple layers of meaning, which can be uncovered in a variety of ways. A helpful process is to allow dialogue between different perspectives to allow for a deeper understanding of the text.

⁹⁹ This concept was shared by Professor Jan Jans of Tilburg University in a Skype conversation, May 2015.

For example, Paul seems to contradict himself sometimes. Historians tell us that his perspectives changed as he grew as a Christian, and so his views shifted. He wrote 1 Corinthians early on, and made very specific hierarchical rules for how women should behave in church. He was still very influenced by Jewish culture then, and its beliefs in the inferiority of women. Later he wrote in Galatians (3:28): "...*there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female. All are one in Christ Jesus*". This shows a big shift in his thinking.

It can be helpful when we try and discern the truth for our lives, **not to argue with the Bible**.

Instead we can use the internal contradictions in the Bible to teach us. We can **allow the contradictory verses to 'argue with each other'**. Then we can reflect on why there is a difference, and test what might be appropriate in our lives and society today.

This is the way this Tool approaches the Bible. It looks at the classic Bible verses that are used to address the question of homosexuality. Then it looks at other related verses, and sets up a dialogue between them. The TIME TO TALK exercises open up opportunities to do this in groups.

Our **ultimate authority is of course, Jesus**, and it is useful to test Scripture against Jesus' own teachings and actions.

It is important to **read any extract from the Bible against the background of its basic message**: the story of God's saving plan for all of humanity in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate Word of God (John 1) - the Alpha and Omega of our faith.

Using the Bible to guide our decisions

Christians use the Bible to guide our decisions. Some people try to use it as a kind of manual for life, but it doesn't always work like that. Life can be complicated, and the world has changed drastically since Biblical times. Not to mention, the Bible actually spans over 1000 years!



Time to talk: Can we use the Bible to give us answers to everything?

There are many things that we take for granted today that were never mentioned in the Bible.

How do we discern God's guidance in our lives about those?

- Think of some things in your everyday life that would not have existed in either Old or New Testament times. Talk about them:
 - For example: Some people say that using technology - like the internet, Facebook, computer games, and even WhatsApp or Mixit - is not good for young people. They say that it can be addictive and can expose them to all sorts of negative influences.



You won't find direct answers in any isolated Bible verses, but you can discern what is right for you.

Based on your knowledge of the values and principles in Bible as a whole, what would you say is the appropriate way to deal with each of these things?

- Think about other modern things, like fast food, genetically modified (GMO) food production, or anything else not mentioned in the Bible. How can your understanding of the Spirit, Gospel values and how Jesus lived, help to guide your own life?

Did homosexuality exist in Biblical times?

It is now accepted that the concept 'homosexuality' as an orientation, as we know it today, did not exist in either Old Testament or New Testament times. It was assumed that everyone was heterosexual. The term 'homosexual' was first coined in the 1880s, and so is a modern concept.
¹⁰⁰

There are various opinions on the actual meanings of the words used in the original Hebrew or Greek.

The original words most likely referred to forms of **sexual behaviour practised by heterosexuals, mostly in temple prostitution for idol worship.** The **Old Testament** Israelites were to strictly keep themselves separate from any religious practices of their neighbours and keep themselves pure for God, and so temple prostitution was taboo.

Or it was **rape, used to degrade a foreigner or enemy as part of the spoils of war.** And we know today that rape is less of a sexual act, and more about a show of power.

The **New Testament** passages also referred to similar practices: male and female prostitution, idol worship, and a practice called *pederasty*. This was a practice amongst many Roman soldiers and elder men in Corinth who used some of their young male slaves sexually.

These would have infuriated Paul. He was steeped in Jewish history and culture, which strongly rejected any of these practices as idolatry and lust.

The references now described as 'homosexuality' could not have meant committed, loving homosexual relationships as we know them today.

¹⁰⁰ This does not mean that people who may have felt attracted to the same sex all their lives did not exist, but it does mean that the social norms at the time would have meant this would not have been talked about.

Pitfalls when reading the Bible

We have seen that the Bible is a complex set of books, and jumping to our own conclusions too quickly about what it is saying can be dangerous. There are at least 4 pitfalls we can fall into when reading the Bible, which can lead us into making mistakes if we are not open to learning more deeply.

These include:

1. We can be tempted to **look for rules, and then impose them on others** in a top-down way, without really understanding what the writer originally meant or listening to those on whom they impose these.
 - For example, some churches still insist that women have to wear hats in church. The verse in the original Greek (1 Corinthians 11:5) referred to women never shaving their heads, as this was the mark of (temple) prostitutes in Corinth. Corinthian Church women were thus to show that they were not prostitutes or engaging in idol worship by keeping their hair long and their heads covered in church. Most churches no longer insist on women covering their heads, because the social dynamics are different.
2. We can hold on to **isolated verses** that we think have the quick answers we need, and then we try to **apply them to all situations and for all of time**.
 - For example, many wedding sermons preach on Ephesians 5:22 ("Wives, submit to your husbands") without looking at the whole passage, which is introduced by verse 5:21: "Submit, therefore, to one another out of reverence for Christ". If more marriages were based on verse 21, there would perhaps be many more happy marriages.
3. We **apply the different verses and/or rules inconsistently**
 - usually preferring those that refer to sins we are not likely to commit anyway (like homosexual practices if we are heterosexual), while ignoring those that we know we do (like judging others and speaking badly about them).
4. We **select those verses that justify our opinions**, and ignore others. There are many examples where this has caused a lot of pain and suffering in the church.
 - Passages like 1 Timothy 2:11 ("I do not permit women to teach...") have been used by churches to block women from taking up positions as pastors and clergy. But as we know, Jesus sent Mary Magdalene to teach about the resurrection (Matthew 28:10; John 20:16-18). While some large denominations still insist on all-male clergy, many churches now allow women into ordained ministry.
 - Slavery was, for many years, justified by quoting individual verses in the Bible, like Leviticus 25:42. Even beating or raping a slave was condoned using Exodus 21: 20-21; and Leviticus 19:20. Several New Testament passages also provided biblical justification for keeping slaves (Luke 12:43-47; Luke 17: 9; Matthew 18:33; Philemon 1:16). There are no verses in the Bible that say slavery is wrong. The anti-slavery lobby did not have an easy job convincing the churches that slavery was against God's will, and did so by challenging them to go back to the Spirit of the Gospel, and it took many years.

"Christian rethinking on this issue is not merely a capitulation to secular culture"
 Archbishop D. Gomez et al. *True Union in the Body?*
 (An Evangelical Anglican exploration on homosexuality)



The Holy Spirit sometimes pushes us out of our comfort zones

Sometimes a passage that made sense at a certain time in history and under specific social conditions, is no longer relevant. This challenges church leaders to re-interpret these passages to be able to make sense of current knowledge and events. The choice then, is either to become narrower and hold onto isolated verses that keep us from moving forward, or to explore more deeply, even if we are uneasy about it.

There is ample evidence in the Bible, as well as in the history of the Church, that people do change their minds about what God may be saying in their lives.



Time to talk: Biblical examples of the Holy Spirit's leading

Together, talk about the following examples from the Bible:

- Leviticus 11:7 and Deuteronomy 14:8 contain the instruction never to eat pork, because “it is unclean for you” (Lev.11:7).
 - Why do you think pork was regarded as unclean, whereas cow’s meat was not?
 - Do you eat pork? If not, why not, and if yes, why is it OK?¹⁰¹

There are other examples in The Bible where the Holy Spirit has completely changed a person’s views on a principle or law that they have felt strongly about.

- Read Acts 10: 9- 11:18. It tells the story of how the Holy Spirit deals with Peter, changes his mind and uses him powerfully in a new kind of ministry to people he had thought God was not interested in.¹⁰²
 - Peter was sharply criticised by the other apostles for contradicting the Law. Read through his argument in Chapter 11 carefully, and consider why it was so convincing.

Another example is Paul himself. He completely changed his mind when challenged by Jesus - from being a staunch Jew that persecuted and killed Christians, to becoming a central figure in the establishment and growth of the Christian Church. His influence is still profound today.

There are also more recent examples of how the Holy Spirit has moved Christians beyond familiar teachings to completely new insights, to enable God to minister to the needs of God’s people at different times in history.



¹⁰¹ Historically, this made sense, because pork could make people incredibly ill. Medical science has uncovered why this was the case: there was a small parasite that would settle in the brain and cause terrible sickness. Since then, laws exist in most if not all countries that regulate how pork is processed and tested for this parasite, so pork is now quite safe to eat. So now in many countries, pork is eaten freely.

So most Christians eat pork, and it is not regarded as sinful.

¹⁰² Peter believed firmly that his ministry excluded gentiles (non-Jews), but his mind was changed completely by God’s intervention (Acts 10: 9-17; 27). He ended up preaching the Gospel directly to some Roman soldiers (Acts 10: 44-48). This lead to the apostles’ early ministry first being opened to non-Jews (Acts 11: 1-4; 17-18). Without Peter responding to the Spirit’s leading him in a totally new direction, Christianity as a world religion would not exist!



Time to talk: The Church's journey with HIV

Read through the following summary of the churches' journeys with HIV over the past few decades, and then answer the questions that follow.

In Jesus' day, people with any kind of illness were considered to have sinned against God and were outcasts. He openly argued against this kind of prejudice. ("Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." John 9: 3)

In the past few decades, this same attitude of most caused terrible hurt to people living with HIV. It even fuelled the HIV epidemic because it pushed people living with HIV into secrecy.

Christians referred to HIV as a punishment for (sexual) sins (Deuteronomy 28: 27-29), and compared it to the plagues meted out on the Egyptians in Exodus (7-12). They used Deuteronomy 7:12-15 to justify expelling people living with HIV out of their churches: "Do not bring an abhorrent thing into your house..."

Over time, church leaders and members have become more informed about the disease, and more people (including their loved ones) have disclosed their status.

People have been challenged to re-look at the Bible verses that they used to justify judging HIV+ people as sinners, even excluding them from their churches. They have overcome their prejudices and realised that the overriding message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is one of love, mercy and forgiveness.

So over time, many Christians have managed to overcome their prejudices. Nowadays many churches openly talk about HIV and have programmes to help people living with HIV. HIV infected people are more able to be open about their status, and some even lead their churches' HIV projects. Unfortunately, because HIV is mostly sexually transmitted, some churches still struggle to embrace people living with HIV. They are still journeying towards fully embracing people with HIV.

- What strikes you about the journey of the wider Church in Southern Africa with HIV? How did this process evolve in your own church?
- What changed Christians' perspectives about people living with HIV?
- Is it possible that churches today might be on a similar journey around the question of LGBTIs? What might be some of the main challenges on this journey, and how might we overcome them?



Using the Bible responsibly

The Bible contains more wisdom and depth than any other literature Christians have ever read.

But the Bible has been misused throughout history. This could be because of the power of the Church, or because of the moral dynamics within the Bible itself. Sometimes it has been used to oppress others and limit their freedom, and even to justify evil. At other times it has been used to excuse our own sinfulness and avoid taking responsibility for our actions.

It is important that we interrogate any passages deeply, in light of the literary and social contexts in which they were written, as well as what we know about our current context.

Before we go to the 'homosexuality' texts, let us briefly look at what the Bible says about sexual ethics as a whole.

There are many contradictions in the Bible regarding different aspects of human sexuality. It is worth looking at some of these, because it might help to shed some light on the passages about sexual diversity.



Time to talk: What does the Bible say about sexual relations and morality?

Choose one or more of the following issues, and explore some of the bible verses that talk about them.

1. Marriage and Abstaining from marriage (celibacy)

Read Genesis 1: 28 and 2: 24

- What do these verses say is the purpose of marriage?
 - Now read 1Timothy 4: 1-3.
 - What does this passage say about forbidding people to get married?
- Does this mean that single people and childless couples are sinning because they are going against God's standard for marriage? Does it mean that Paul and Jesus also sinned?
- The Catholic Church forbids priests and nuns from getting married. They argue that this practice is biblical by referring to 1 Corinthians 7: 32 and 37.
- So what is the right thing to you? How would you decide whether to get married or not?



2. Adultery

- Compare Deuteronomy 22:20-22 with John 8:1-11.
- What do you notice about the way Jesus responded to the men about to stone the women caught in adultery? Did he focus on the letter of the Law or the Spirit of love underlying it?
- Matthew 5:28 warns that a man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery! Yet, in most cultures today this is seen as a mark of a real full-blooded man. Why do you think we are lenient about this, but not about homosexuality?
- Which of the above verses most influences your understanding of God's will about faithfulness in marriage? Why?

3. Rape (forced sex)

- Read Deuteronomy 22: 23-29. (The New Testament does not make any direct reference to rape.)
- How have these verses (and the New Testament's silence) influenced current myths about rape, and the solutions devised by some families and communities?

Essentially, the Bible clearly does not have a consistent position on all aspects of sexual ethics. The Church has referred more to the general Spirit of the Gospel to slowly but surely change its views in light of modern understandings of issues and the need for freedom, human dignity, rights and responsibilities for both women and men.

Using the Bible responsibly to grapple with the hard questions about sexual diversity

Let us now look at the 8 passages that mention something like homosexuality, and make up our own minds.

The 8 texts that refer to homosexual acts

It is important when using the Bible as a Tool to guide our decisions and how we live our lives, to ask ourselves the following three questions:

- **What was meant at the time they were written, given the society the writer lived in?**
- **How do the verses fit into the passages of which they are part? and**
- **What might this passage mean in today's context, given what we now know about the issue?**

The 8 verses in the Bible that have been used often to judge homosexuality as an orientation (usually with the other forms of sexual diversity mixed up in this term) are the following:

The Law of Moses:

Leviticus 18: 22

Leviticus 20: 13

Stories:

Genesis 1: 27 and Genesis 2: 24
 Genesis 19: 1-14; 29

Paul's Letters:

Romans 1: 26-27
 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10
 1 Timothy 1: 10

We saw in Part 1 that many Christians quote Bible verses to condemn and even exclude people who do not seem to fit into the norms they have set for a 'good' Christian, because they are not heterosexual. They stigmatise them as sinners and not worthy to be members of the Church.

"The Church's stance on homosexuality sent a clear message of rejection to me... Seeing that my faith was very important to me and to stop the fear and pain of being rejected, I tried to conform by attending several support groups and going for counselling. I was also part of an ex-gay ministry (for recovering gay people) for several years. However none of these efforts changed my sexual orientation. In order to obey the church's teaching, I lived in denial of who I was and I settled for a life of celibacy and secrecy. ... This worsened my pain and steered me into a deep hole of [unhappiness] and depression." Ecclesia de Lange

Some people turn all different kinds of passages into rules, but actually only some books of the Bible were written to give instructions for how God's people should live. These are the books of the Law, such as Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

They contain what is called the "Holiness Code" – rules given to the ancient Israelites to help them keep themselves from the influences of the Babylonians, Assyrians and the Canaanites, who were their nearest neighbours. These contained many rules, which became their Law. People who did not obey them were punished severely.

Many people assume that homosexuality is wrong because it is listed as one of God's Laws, and carries a severe punishment. However, recall what we learnt earlier – that Leviticus could not have been talking about homosexuality as an orientation, but rather about homosexual acts of heterosexual men as part of idol worship or male prostitution.

The Legal passages in Leviticus



Time to talk: Relating to the Israelites' Holiness Code today

Re-read Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

- (How) does knowing that the translations we have today might be misleading affect how you feel about homosexuality as an orientation today?

These passages do refer to homosexual acts.

- Does this mean perhaps, that homosexual people can be accepted, but not allowed to practise?
- Is this a reasonable alternative? How do you think a homosexual person would feel about this?

To decide for ourselves, let us look at some of the other Laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy:

- Talk about some of the following verses: Why do we not also take on board some other verses that also appear as commandments in the Israelites' Holiness Code?
 - Leviticus 19:27 (men should never shave their beards);
 - Deuteronomy 19:21 (show no pity when revenge is necessary);
 - Leviticus 19:19 (never plant two kinds of seeds in one field or wear two kinds of fabrics at once);
 - Leviticus 23: 3 (keep the Sabbath day on the LAST day of the week);
 - Can you think of any others that are no longer practised today? (There are many!)
- Do you think that the argument that homosexuality is a punishable sin is correct, based on Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13?



Time to talk: How did Jesus relate to the Laws in the Holiness Code?

Jesus, our ultimate role model, **said that he had “not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfil”** (Matthew 5:17).

- Read Matthew 5.

Which laws from the Holiness Code does he refer to, when he used the words: "*you have heard it said..., but...*". What is he actually doing? Talk about how the world he was living in may have been different from the early days of Exodus when the Laws of Moses were written. How might this have influenced His thinking?
- How is today's world different from the days of the Exodus?
- Think about the following: At that time, having many children was seen as an important part of nation building, and so procreation was an important value. Is this still as important today? What do we know about homosexuality and sexual diversity that the people then did not know about? (Refer back to the section in Part 1 on Understanding Sexual Diversity – on pg 291.)

Jesus often got into trouble with the religious leaders of his day for not obeying the letter of the Law.

- Read the following passages and talk about them:
 - He and his disciples were caught picking grain and eating it on a Sabbath (Luke 6:1; 12:1);
 - He spoke to women in public and allowed them to speak to him (John 4: 4-26);
 - He healed the sick on the Sabbath Day of Rest (Mt 12:2-12);
 - He challenged the religious leaders directly (Matthew 23:4, and 23-24).

We read in the Gospels that Jesus later summed up the 10 Commandments into only 2 commandments that are based in Love and Grace:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."
(Matthew 22: 36-40)



- What can we learn from the way Jesus revisited the Laws of Moses given in the Legal books?
- What might this mean for how we use Leviticus in the homosexuality debate today?

Genesis 19: Sodom and Gomorrah¹⁰³

This story is used most often to show how homosexuals are condemned to destruction by God: “*Anyone who has heard of the cities of “Sodom and Gomorrah (sic)” knows that they were notorious hotbeds of homosexuality.*” Bob Davies, past President, Exodus International.¹⁰⁴

Let us revisit it to see if this is really the case.



Time to talk: What was the Sin of Sodom?

Read through the whole of Genesis 18 and 19.

- Did God decide to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah before or after the incident where the men of the city tried to rape the angels and then Lot? (See Gen 18:17, 20, 22 and 19:13)
- Were the men homosexual or heterosexual? How many of the city's men were involved? (See Gen 19:4 and 8).
- From your reading of the text, what do you think were the sins that made God so angry?
- Sodom's sin was referred back to in other books of the Bible. What did they say was the sin of Sodom? Read Isaiah 1: 1-17; Ezekiel 16: 49-50.
- Read Luke 10:10-12 and Matthew 10:14-15.
- What is the most important thing you have learnt from revisiting this passage?
- Rev Walter Wink says that the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is actually irrelevant to the whole debate about homosexuality. Do you agree or disagree? Talk about why.

Remember- it is OK to disagree!



The New Testament Letters

Many people quote verses like Romans 1: 26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10, to justify condemning homosexuals and even excluding them from entering their churches.

They do seem to be quite convincing. However, we must remember again that Paul would most likely have been referring to homosexual acts for idol worship or prostitution.

‘For quite some time we've been imprisoned in a worldview that's neither honouring toward our fellow human beings, nor biblical.’
Alan Chambers, Exodus Ministries

¹⁰³ Please see Attachment 2 for a full Contextual Bible Study on the Sodom and Gomorrah story.

¹⁰⁴ From the Exodus Standard, USA.

Paul talks about men acting contrary to what is 'natural' for them. This shows that he must have been talking about heterosexuals behaving differently from what they naturally do¹⁰⁵. He did not talk at any point about homosexuality as an orientation from a young age.

During his time in Corinth and Rome, there was a homosexual practice called *pederasty* – where an older, often prominent man would 'take care' of a young boy (12-16 of age), and schooled him to become a good Greek or Roman citizen. In Rome at least, this may have included a time of military service. After the age of 16, the boys were expected to marry and raise a family.

None of the practices Paul refers to involved people of homosexual orientation or faithful, permanent relationships with people of the same sex.



Time to talk: Reading the New Testament verses in their literary context

So what was Paul talking about in these letters?

To understand more fully, it is important to read the rest of the passage that each verse is part of.

- Read through the following passages, in which these verses are contained:
 - Roman 1: 18- 2:4
 - 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11
 - 1 Timothy 1: 9-16

- What strikes you about the three lists of sins, into which homosexual practice is included?
 - Are you guilty of any of the sins listed?
- What do the passages say are the consequences of these?
- What do all the sexual acts listed here have in common?
- How do these passages end?

"Does God still love me?"
Monique.

The homosexual acts mentioned are listed amongst **long lists of other sins**. They also include sins related to unhealthy relationships, such as envy, strife, deceit (little lies), gossips, heartlessness and rebellion against parents.

And yet in our churches today - who ever heard of the gossips, who heartlessly spread slander about homosexuals being excluded from church, or a church expelling children who are cheeky and rebel against their parents?



¹⁰⁵ Some people say that, since most homosexuals are born with that orientation, it is just as unnatural for them to engage in heterosexual acts, and so they should not be forced into marriage or heterosexual acts as a 'cure'.

The purpose seems to be less about condemning certain types of sinners, and more about reminding the reader that every single one of us is actually a sinner, and thus has no right to judge others!

Nowhere do these texts condemn loving, respectful sexual relationships between adults in a faithful marriage relationship – whether homo- or heterosexual.

What a wider reading of these texts shows is how dangerous it is to take out isolated verses, draw one's own conclusions as to what they mean, and create the impression that some sins are more serious than others. This is contrary to the Biblical concept that "*all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God*" (Romans 3:23).

How does Jesus use the Creation stories, and does he speak about homosexuality?

The story of Creation is used in a number of places in the New Testament. Paul uses it in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 14) to justify his argument for women being silent in church.

Nowadays, most churches no longer insist on this. They accept that Paul was writing as a Jewish man of his time, who lived in a society where women were never exposed to Biblical (or any) education. They learnt from their mothers or later their husbands, if they had any questions. This was early in Paul's journey with Christ, and it is interesting that later he worked closely with women leaders of early church groups such as Priscilla (1Corinthians 16:19), Junia (Romans 16:7) and Phoebe (Romans 16: 1, 27).

Jesus refers to it too, but he does so in a very different way.



Time to talk: Jesus, the creation and sexual diversity

Read Matthew 19:3-6; 11-12 (read also 7-10 if you have time)

- What do you think is the main reason why Jesus is referring to these verses? What question is he answering?
- What do you think He means by "*Not everyone can accept this teaching*" and "*some are eunuchs from birth, and some have been made eunuchs by others*"?¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ The term 'Eunuch' is used either literally, as a man who cannot have sex because he is castrated or who is born with a defect, or for one who chooses not to have sex or marry for religious reasons – i.e. is celibate. Eunuchs were used in a king's court to look after the king's wives or concubines (women kept as sexual companions over and above a king's wives). Some historians say that sometimes a king would castrate slaves to make sure they were obedient and not too strong. (Anthony Ashford, www.religioustolerance.org)

Some people argue that this is evidence that Jesus is not opposed to homosexuals, but others disagree. However, it is clear that Jesus did not expect every person to marry and have children, and that he accepted that some people did not fit into the heterosexual norms of the day.

- Talk about what this might mean for how the church should relate to people who do not fit into the heterosexual norms today, but are, for example, transgender, intersex or homosexual.

So what does all this mean for how we use the Bible?

Now that we have dug into The Bible a little more deeply, and have seen how many times different Bible verses seem to contradict each other, it can be very confusing. It can seem easier to just hold onto specific rules and expect them to hold true for all situations and all times.

But the Word of God is more than a book. It is even bigger than the Christian sacred text, the Bible. The First chapter of John tells us that the Word of God is in fact Jesus, who spoke all of creation into being and continues, through the Holy Spirit, to dwell amongst us today.

Many Christians have picked out the few verses from the Bible that refer to sexual acts between people of the same sex and present them as unchangeable law. As we have seen above, it is also possible to use the Bible itself to argue against narrow and over-simplified interpretations.

To sum up:

- there seems to be general agreement that certain sexual practices are NOT acceptable, whether they were allowed in Old Testament times or not; and
- there are also others that people argue ARE acceptable, even though some Bible verses say they are not.



Time to talk: How do we choose which verses hold more weight?

Read through the following lists of sexual practices¹⁰⁷, and see if you agree with the writer's view of whether churches today find them acceptable or not:

Virtually all modern readers would agree with the Bible in rejecting:

- *Incest*
- *Rape*
- *Adultery*
- *Intercourse with animals.*



¹⁰⁷ This list is adapted from Wink (www.forusa.org)

*Bodily fluid, out of place, was most likely to have been considered as a loss of life-giving fluids and thus represented death.

But we disagree with the Bible on most other sexual norms. The Bible condemned the following behaviours which most churches today generally allow:

- *exogamy (marriage with non-Israelites, or outside of one's own tribe or group)*
- *celibacy (apart from celibacy as a calling – though the Catholic Church still expects this of priests and nuns)*
- *intercourse during menstruation (though this is still taboo amongst some cultures)*
- *naming sexual organs*
- *nudity (under certain conditions)*
- *masturbation (some Christians still condemn this)*
- *birth control (some Christians still forbid this)*

And the Bible regarded semen and menstrual blood as unclean, which only churches steeped in very traditional rural cultures do, but most do not.*

Likewise, the Bible permitted behaviours unacceptable to the church today:

- *prostitution*
- *polygamy*
- *widows marrying the brothers of their husbands after their death to ensure they had sons (though widow cleansing is still practised in some traditional cultural settings)*
- *sex with slaves and concubinage (keeping multiple sexual 'companions')*
- *treatment of women as property (even though some men misuse the traditional cultural concept of the bride price / lobola as giving them the right to 'own' their wives and demand absolute obedience)*
- *very early marriage (for the girl, age 11-13, although this also has been controversial in some societies).*

Homosexuality seems to be just one more issue that churches today have to re-visit, like all those above, and decide how to deal with it. Our responses will, no doubt, not all be the same. We will be influenced by our socialisation and cultural influences.

When using the Bible to discern God's guidance in our lives and in the life of our church, Bishop David Russell (2009) advises us to **discern between those teachings that were of the times** (usually linked to specific customs and outlooks of the day) **and those which are for all times.**

So we can see that different Bible verses do not all carry the same weight. But how can we know the difference?

The best safety net, for Christians seeking to discern God's will through the Scriptures, is to ask ourselves: what is the **Spirit of the Gospel** that we are called to serve?

Paul clarified the ministry Jesus has called us to, as follows:

"God ... [has] made us competent to be ministers of a New Covenant, not of letter [law], but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Corinthians 3:6)

He also argued against those who were trying to impose the requirements from the 'old' Law of Moses, and sounds a solemn warning:

"You, who are trying to be justified by Law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." (Galatians 5: 4-6)

"It is no small task to bring together ideals of non-discrimination and deeply entrenched religious beliefs. It's a huge struggle to marry the two, to respond in a way that is inclusive without going against the principles and the dogma of the church." Marlow Valentine, Triangle Project. (in Vukani, Thursday July 22 2010, p14)

Developing an inclusive ministry

In working through this Tool, we have learnt a lot about sexual diversity, and what the Bible says (and doesn't) about sexual ethics and morality.

To help us make sense of all the different voices on this subject, we have reflected on the essential values and principles that guide our faith, and tried to imagine - **what kind of church do we want our churches to be?**

"I had to ask myself – did I leave the church, or did the church leave me?" Arnold Motsau

This section begins with a time to share our visions of our churches, and looks at some exciting examples of approaches and ministries that are welcoming and affirming of all God's people, whatever their sexual identity or orientation.

It then goes on to explore some ideas and resources to help us empower ourselves to open up conversations about the issue in our churches and wider society.

It closes with a section that reflects on the process we have been through as we worked through the Tool, to help those who feel called to this work for inclusiveness. It ends with an exciting new development in Africa, which we are invited to join and become Change Agents in our faith communities and communities.

Perhaps the most important criteria for discerning what the Holy Spirit is saying through The Bible relate to whether our interpretation:

- is based on the core values of the Gospel: love and mercy,
- promotes goodness and holiness, and
- respects human dignity and leads towards greater wholeness.

Opening Doors: What does an inclusive, affirming faith community look like?

Reflecting on our own churches and communities



Time to talk: How inclusive of sexual diversity are our churches, and how inclusive do we want them to be?

- What is the situation in your country, society and community regarding sexual diversity? Are there any special issues or incidents that you would like to talk about?
- What is the position of your church on this issue? (You would know from sermons, Bible studies or your church newsletter, or our official Constitution or other statutes.)
- As far as you know - are homosexuals, transgender or intersex people able to be open about their gender identity and sexual orientation? Are they involved in leadership in any way?



Source: IAM



Time to talk: What would I like to say to my church?

Read some of the things other people have said to their churches on the following page, and then share what you would like to say to your church.

"The church leaders, I would like to tell them, it's not their duty to judge us"
Samuel Genafa, Uganda.

"We don't even have respect for who we are. Because we believe we are nothing. ... I have a friend who I cannot convince that God loves you as you are. She lives with her partner, but in the belief that she is going to hell. It breaks my heart. Because that's what the church did."

Madalene Isaacks, Namibia.

"If we are looking at reconciliation and... unity with all Rwandese, ... if we can forgive those that killed others, I mean why, why, why us who are innocent people are not given our peace in our country?" Naome Ruzindana, Rwanda.

".... We are not killers., we are not murderers, we are not molesters, we are not, you know, bad. We love deeply truly honestly and we should be given a chance to show that to the world. Do not force people into closets." Anonymous lesbian, Kenya.

"Often the church seems welcoming though it has a selective condition of accepting LGBTQ people. ... [Sometimes] I would be spiritually motivated and uplifted but immediately after that I would be crushed when the pastor ... talked bad about gay people, which robbed me of my spiritual upliftment. This has chased me out of the church. In most cases, the church is not aware how it pushes people away and causes depression, isolation and spiritual hunger to many LGBTQ of faith, and some resort to suicide or drugs ... The church needs to treat all children of God as equal and loved."

Thembani Chamane, South Africa

"My name is Lukas Mukongo. I am a 30 year old African gay man. ... My African culture believes that it is unAfrican to be homosexual. ... I chose to stay in the church and the church people allowed me.... I am an African, and I ask that we stand together and work for our God." Lukas Mukongo.

"You know the Church in Nigeria is a very powerful tool of change. So if the churches change their views about homosexuals and LGBT people ... and stop preaching gay hate and start to preach inclusion and tolerance and love, I believe it will go a long way." Stephen Wariebi Hobobo, Nigeria.

"The anointing that I believe the bishops have from God is something that should allow them to use the pulpit as a place to talk about love." Fadzai Muprutsa, Zimbabwe.

Here is a space to write down what you would like to say to your church:

Share your ideas about what an inclusive and affirming church or faith community would be like.

- Would there be a separate programme for LGBTIs or would an inclusive approach be integrated into all programmes? Think about:
 - Congregational participation and inclusion (e.g. sermons, governance structures and leadership, sacraments – baptism, marriage etc., programmes for children, youth, parents, HIV+ and sick people, prayer groups)
 - Ordination/licensing of priests/ministers and lay ministers
 - Marriages/blessings of partnerships

Some good news!

Below are some extracts of stories and documents of faith communities that are on the journey to become ministries in Africa that are welcoming and affirming of all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

This is, of course, a journey¹⁰⁸.

Most of us have not fully arrived, no matter how long we have been travelling this road. It is a journey of transforming centuries of prejudice and stereotypes, and for some of us, it is a journey of healing from our self-stigma. It is a personal journey for each one of us, as well as being a journey for the Body of Christ as a whole.

"If the God we worship hated homosexual people, I wouldn't worship that God."
Desmond Tutu.

¹⁰⁸ It can be helpful to group Southern Africa churches into 3 main types of Church responses:

A. **Conservative Churches** (strongly opposed)

- Most churches of all denominations in countries where homosexuality is criminalised
- Most evangelical and Pentecostal churches
- Conservative Protestants
- Most African Initiated churches, like Shembe, Zionist, etc. check

B. **Radical Christian groups** (inclusive and affirming)

- Small denominations e.g. Metropolitan Community Churches, (See list under Resources below)
- LGBTI-friendly lobbying networks (in all traditions): E.g. Holy Trinity LGBTI Support Group (Catholic).

C. **Liberal - Moderate & Polarised Protestant Churches** (tolerant)

- Roman Catholic Church
- Most Protestant denominations e.g. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa, Anglican Church in Southern Africa, Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, Methodist Church of Southern Africa.
- Some Pentecostal and evangelical churches, like Rhema International.

Stories of the journeys and/or documents of some churches

South Africa as a case study: An open Constitution is challenging churches, though attitudes change slowly

There have been slow shifts in the attitudes of a number of South African churches over the past 10 years, from the fundamentalist views that condemned homosexuality outright.¹⁰⁹

The liturgical churches whose structures cut across several SADC countries, like the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Uniting Reformed and Congregational churches, all seem to agree on the need to intensify dialogue on the issue of homosexuality, and accept that there are various different views on the issue. None have formally agreed on the ordination of homosexual clergy, and many constitutions are silent on this matter. But they have all called for a pastoral approach¹¹⁰ - for homosexuals to be treated with respect and dignity, and inclusion. However, in practice, there are still reports of ill-treatment of homosexuals and other sexual identities, both at local and wider church level, experiencing discrimination.

There is some diversity amongst evangelical churches, although the overriding view is strongly opposed to accepting homosexuals, and stories abound of homosexuals being expelled. The top leadership of the Rhema Church, arguably the biggest in South Africa, claim all that homosexuals are welcome (though with limited conditions), although at local level, there are reports of homosexuals feeling discriminated against¹¹¹.

The African Initiated churches consist of many smaller groups (like the Pentecostals). But overall, they seem to agree with their cultural attitudes, and seem to have very strong positions against homosexuality as a Western imposition. But even within those, there is evidence of some voices pleading for acceptance of homosexuals on the ground that there are many African homosexuals who feel alienated from their churches because of this position.

The fact that homosexuality is illegal in 38¹¹² African countries, and in some cases punishable by death, makes it very difficult for the country dioceses of moderate Southern African churches to openly grapple with these questions.

A Church opens its doors to LGBTI people: Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Johannesburg's LGBTI Group

"Not only is Holy Trinity Church, which is on the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand, gay-friendly, it advertises the fact on its website under the headline "ALL are welcome here".



¹⁰⁹ This is a very broad summary of the general trends in the different churches, but the overriding sense is that in the Southern African region the conversation is beginning to open up, at least at senior leadership level in South Africa. To find out what specific denominations say about homosexuality, google: "Views of different churches in Southern Africa on homosexuality" (or insert the name of the church or country you are looking for). There is much less information on this for countries other than South Africa, because of the varying legal constraints in the different countries.

¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, most churches have not actually spelt out what a 'pastoral approach' might mean at this stage.

¹¹¹ Marius Oosthuizen. 2013. *The evolving role of the Rhema Movement in the South African public square*. In NGTT Deel 54 Supplementum 4, 2013; and *Rhema Church Homophobic, says Gay Man*. In Sunday World, 10 May 2015.

¹¹² Mozambique has decriminalised homosexuality as recently as May 2015. Although it was not mentioned specifically in its Penal Code, the phrase 'vices against nature' was often interpreted as referring to homosexuality. But in practice, stigma continues to thrive in all countries, regardless of their laws.

"Through baptism gay people have the right to participate fully in the life of the church. I know many homosexuals who are valuable and active members of the church," said Father Russell Pollitt, the parish priest.

Five years ago, [he] was approached by a group of people wanting to start an LGBTI support group. The group now meets fortnightly and is about 25 people strong. Many are migrants and refugees living in South Africa.

The LGBTI group aims to provide a safe haven for the LGBTI Christian Community from all walks of life.

The group's co-ordinator, Dumisani Dube, said he and many others no longer feel unworthy of Catholicism. "I used to feel like it was not right being a homosexual and a Christian. Now I can pray to God and know I am his child whether I am gay or not."

At Holy Trinity the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) members are an integral part of the congregation.

The group initially faced some hostility from the congregants, but after anti-homophobic messages from the pulpit and the creation of platforms for debate and dialogue, the LGBTI congregants gradually came to be seen as nothing out of the ordinary." Faeeza Ballim. Holy Trinity: This church welcomes homosexuals. Mail and Guardian. 19 April 2013

A Council of Churches with senior clergy in a rural area

"Bishop X is a leader and founder of one of a charismatic church in Uthungulu district. He is well known for his spirit of ecumenism.Together with other senior leaders he admitted that he didn't hesitate to chase homosexuals out, as his church is a place of worship.. and added that even the African culture doesn't approve of this demon.

We decided to create more spaces to have homosexuality discussed: dialogues, capacity building workshops, theological reflections and breakfast briefings. Bishop X participated actively, and he is no longer the same. He admits that he was wrong for discriminating, and supporting those who kicked out gays and lesbians out of their churches. He wishes to open the doors of his church for all people of God irrespective of culture, background and sexual orientation to come and worship. He serves as an ambassador of our programme, helping those he says are 'still in the darkness' to get a better understanding of what God says about loving your neighbour." Mxolisi Nyuswa, KwaZulu Regional Christian Council, South Africa

Churches specifically serving the LGBTI communities¹¹³

Metropolitan Community Church

This network of churches began as a single church in the USA, in 1968. The movement aims to offer a spiritual home to people who belong to the LGBTI community, as well as anyone else who may have been excluded from other congregations. The MCC has been on the forefront of civil and human rights movements by addressing important issues such as racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and other forms of oppression. Their approach combines spirituality, sexuality and justice.

They have member churches in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa.

I could make sense of being me

"The [church] was always a big part of my life. And when I came out to myself, I noticed that I was distancing myself from the church. ... I have been at the Metropolitan Community Church now for the last seven years. ... [F]or me, you know, it was a way I found a space in which I would marry my sexuality and my spirituality again and I could make sense of being me, but maintaining the importance of my spirituality in my life.... [It] has really made a difference."
Dale Choudree, South Africa

LGBTI Friendly Church Sets Up Roots in Kenya and Uganda

"Homophobia in Africa has increasingly been spread through use of religion with most spiritual heads [saying] that the higher powers known to mankind are against homosexuality or any other sexual nonconformity that isn't in line with the norm.

However, The Community Church of St Sebastian in the Spanish Canary Islands could be on its way to changing such beliefs, [after announcing that] it is setting up sister churches in both Kenya and Uganda. ... [It] is known to openly reach out to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) community.

One of the Church's leaders, Rev Paul Gibson revealed ... that they were in the final stages of putting together the community based church and hoped to spread the love of God to sexual minorities who have been led to believe that being different has automatically stripped them of God's love.

... The church is prioritising its security and that of its to-be congregation, as the society in both countries shuns and continues to persecute sexual minorities. The two East African countries are well known for their stand against LGBTI persons with Uganda having tabled a bill that sought the death penalty for anyone suspected of being gay.

Religious leaders across Africa have for a long time spearheaded the anti-gay campaign. ... [R]eligion being the strong Tool it is, most of the general population has been made to believe that the LGBTI lifestyle is against God's will for mankind.

¹¹³ See a fuller list in Resources, below.

Recently, a radical antigay preacher in Uganda, Bishop David Kiganda, called for the re-tableing of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, ... and he is supported by a number of radical hate propaganda preachers.

While they argue that homosexuality is un-African and is behaviour adopted from the West, gay rights activists pose a [vital] question: "Christianity and most religions practised in Africa were adopted from foreigners, why then don't you condemn them and label them un-African?"

It is from incidents like these that the St Sebastian Church has chosen to set up roots in East Africa in the hope of curbing homophobia by spreading God's love, one person at a time. The Church's ... expansion drive is setting up several sister churches across Asia and hopes to expand even further in Africa." <https://www.kuchutimes.com/2015/05/lgbti-friendly-church-sets-up-roots-in-kenya-and-uganda/#comments>

Empowering ourselves through networking and accessing useful resources

What are some challenges and obstacles in building inclusive and affirming ministries?

Addressing issues of LGBTI, and challenging churches (and our governments) can be extremely difficult and fraught with dangers, from being expelled from our congregation, to being sentenced to prison or death!

It is best to empower ourselves with support – whether from LGBTI networks, legal organisations for protection and support, learning from LGBTI friendly faith communities, or access to educational resources.

This section offers a starting point for this.



Time to talk: Challenges to change, and support needed

- What challenges and obstacles would, or do, you and others face if you started a ministry for sexually diverse people in your church?
Use the questions below to help you think this through.
Where could you get support within your church or denomination?
 - If you live in a country **where homosexuality is illegal**, how might you protect yourselves while also not just staying silent? What laws, other mechanisms or organisations exist that you could call on?
 - How would or do you tackle **cultural resistance to change**, like fear of the erosion of family life?

- Do you feel ready to respond to **doctrinal arguments**? Where could you get further help to deal with this?
- Do you feel it might be useful to use information about **human rights** to help you? What further information would you need to be able to use the human rights discourse and instruments in a programme for LGBTI rights?
- What **other challenges** do or would you face, and where could you find support?

Forming broader links to strengthen our voice and our will

Together, we have more power to bring change than if we work alone. We can learn from groups in society and in different churches that have worked for many years to bring about change.

The List of Resources at the end of this Tool offers a useful starting point.

On 10th September 2014, the Church in Africa took a giant leap forward

Over 30 African church and civil society leaders and theologians from ten African countries gathered for a historic consultation on human sexuality, religion and equality in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Botswana, Cameroon, Lesotho, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The group agreed that they are “*committed to changing the narrative in Africa from persecution of LGBTI persons and their families to acceptance. We are committed to making change happen in faith communities, theological schools, universities and in civil society*”.

“*This consultation had several concrete goals including the creation of a special edition on human sexuality for the Journal of Theology for Southern Africa; an exchange of ideas from African faith leaders for the Reference Group on Human Sexuality of the World Council of Churches; and the development of a network of LGBTI-affirming faith leaders and scholars across the continent.*

On the final day of the consultation, the group met to discuss the way forward which included the drafting of a call to reflection and action for the African continent. “Michael Adee. Director of Global Faith and Justice. www.lgbtglobalfaith.org. September 2014. www.lgbtglobalfaith.org/because-you-are-therefore-i-am/



Time to talk: Accessing support

- Which of the networks, organisations or publications below might be useful for you? How could you use them?
- Do you know any others? Please share their details with others.
- What might be some risks of belonging to these networks in your country, community or church, and how could you minimise these risks?

Becoming Change Agents: The Wheel of Change¹¹⁴

What we think, say and do matters

We have seen above that our stereotypes and negative attitudes and words can cause great harm. At the same time, if we have the courage to SPEAK OUT against homophobia, and to act as role models in the way we relate to people who are homosexual or transgender or intersex, then we have the POWER TO CHANGE MINDSETS and bring healing.

Practical ideas for creating inclusive and affirming faith communities



Time to talk: What can I do?

Discuss together some of your practical ideas:

- As an individual, and
- To help your church grow into a welcoming, friendly and sensitive community?
- Once you have discussed your ideas, read some other ideas, below.



What can I do as an individual?

1. Continue the conversation, and continue reading and exploring on the issue. It is easy to do this by googling 'Homosexuality and the Bible' or similar phrases, and googling for information on what your church stands for. There are many websites in the Resources section below.
2. Avoid stereotyping and condemning. It is so easy to do this and very painful to anyone who is stereotyped or condemned

¹¹⁴ This theory of change has been developed by IAM (Inclusive and Affirming Ministries) as a framework to create open minds, hearts and doors within different countries and communities.

3. Speak out against hate speech, crimes, jokes and inappropriateness.
4. Open doors by making LGTBI friends.
5. Support LGTBI organisations and allies, including their Gay Pride initiatives.

What can I do to help my church to grow into a welcoming, friendly and sensitive community?

1. Encourage LGTBI to participate in church activities (if you find a safe and inclusive faith community). Assist in any way you can to be welcoming to others, especially those who are near to our community.
2. If you are a preacher, use the pulpit to preach against homophobia (fear and hatred of gays and lesbians, or transgender people), and help other to understand how marginalised some individuals (and families) feel because of their (or a family member's) homosexual orientation
3. Start a support group for LGTBI people, friends and family. (This is a creative starting point on a journey to greater integration - i.e...including LGTBI people in congregation activities.)
4. Practice the Contextual Bible Study approach to reading the Bible. (See Practical Tool 2 of the Toolkit.)
5. Create forums for inclusive discussions and dialogues.
6. Lobby for greater inclusive practices e.g. gender neutral application forms/alternative family constructions.
7. Help educate others, especially children, so as to stop homophobic attitudes and prejudice. Young people must know that these are not Christian attitudes and therefore not acceptable. Lead by example!
8. Lobby your Church Council to put in place church policies that explicitly reject unjust discrimination and harassment of any persons, including those with a homosexual inclination. Make sure that the policy includes procedures to handle complaints.

Spreading the Good News: A step by step methodology to build change agents and open doors

IAM is an organisation that has worked for many years towards building "faith communities in Africa that are welcoming and affirming; where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people can participate fully and be strengthened... as human beings." (IAM's Vision Statement)

It does this through programmes that support and empower the LGBTI community to stimulate dialogue about the issues.

An important Tool they use to make this happen is called the "Wheel of Change". Let us explore this, to help us think through how we might become agents of change and in turn help others also.



Time to talk: building change agents in our churches and society



Recognising the steps:

- Go back to the OVERVIEW OF THIS TOOL, page 240 and 247, and talk about the STEPS that we went through in this Tool;
- STEPS 1 and 2: (Preparing our Hearts) Opening our Minds and Hearts (pg 242 and 249 – 280);
- Interim visioning: Imagining what Open Doors would look like (Developing Inclusive Ministries – pg 281)
- STEP 3: Empowering Ourselves through networking (pg 287-8);
- STEP 4: Becoming and building Change Agents (pg 288-291); and
- STEP 5: Beginning to work towards opening doors (pg 281, 292-3)

You will notice that, AFTER Step 2, we imagined what a faith community with open doors would look like, before we went on to Steps 3, 4 and finally 5.

- Why do you think this is the case? How important do you think it is to create the vision before talking about concrete steps to get there?

■ How can people within churches work to shift mindsets?

- For each of the Steps above, draw up a small **plan** for how you will begin to take this Step in your church or faith community. Try to make your plans very specific: who will do what, when, and where? What resources will you need for each activity, in time, people and money? (Sometimes very little money is needed, if you bring the issue into existing meetings and other spaces.)
- Try to remain respectful of the cultural and institutional framework of your church – but do not let that silence you!

Remember, this is a gradual process, and you may spend most of your time initially on Steps 1 and 2. Allow the process to take its time. But try not to get stuck, and move forward as soon as you can with those people who are open and enthusiastic and are prepared to work hard.



Refer to resource lists for those who want to take this further and join the larger movement of churches and Christians, not only in South Africa, who are leading the prophetic voices that have begun opening up this conversation amongst the churches, and continue to listen for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Being change agents and opening doors



Time to talk: being agents of change in our churches and communities

Read through the full text of the call to African leaders, below, and talk about it using the following questions:

- Which of specific clauses below do you feel directly called to in your ministry?
- What will be necessary for you to be able to respond positively to this call?
- Who will you share this Declaration with, and how can you use it to mobilise others to join you to work together as agents of change in your work and society?
- What will be your first steps?

The KwaZulu Natal Declaration

"We, African religious leaders, scholars, and members of civil society are highly concerned with the well-being of our beloved continent and with the demonisation and criminalisation of sexual minorities on the continent,

We, African religious leaders, scholars, and members of civil society met for a consultation in KwaZulu Natal on August 28-31, 2014, in response to the recent contentious debates regarding human sexuality on the continent. Recognising that we are part of the global community, we met in South Africa, a country with a constitution that recognises and protects the rights of sexual minorities,

Aware of the traditional leadership roles that academics, religious institutions, and churches in Africa have played in promoting social justice and human dignity,

Troubled by the misuse of religion to further marginalise and exclude sexual minorities from society and faith communities,

Noting the recommendations on human sexuality from the World Council of Churches 10th Assembly to the Central Committee, and the subsequent approval of the Terms of Reference for the Human Sexuality Reference Group to walk together in a pilgrimage of Justice and Peace from 2014-2021,

Observing the 275: Resolution on Protection against violence and other human rights violations against Persons on the basis of real or imputed sexual orientation and gender identity in Africa issued by the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, 55th Ordinary Session held in Luanda, Angola, from 28th April to 12th May 2014.

Acknowledging the deaths and threats of death, the violence, discrimination, that sexual minorities, women, and children face on the continent.

"I have come to see that it is better to be rejected for who I am than to be accepted for who I am not."
Ecclesia de Lange



We call on all religious institutions, especially Christian Churches

- To care for the least amongst us as Christ has done,
- To create safe spaces for encounter with the sexual diversity within the body of Christ,
- To talk openly about sexual diversities and adversities in human sexuality,
- To break out of the vicious cycle of shame, secrecy, violence, and silence that demeans, demonises and kills,
- To openly condemn violence against sexual minorities.

We call on all African scholars and academic institutions

- To take full responsibility to reflect and produce credible scholarship on human sexuality,
- To conduct research that gives momentum to African local institutions, the Church, and indigenous knowledge and practices to further the understanding of human sexuality,
- To incorporate issues regarding human sexuality in the development of knowledge,
- To guide the public in understanding sexual diversity.

We call on all our governments in Africa

- To take seriously the mission of the state to protect all citizens, including those with disabilities, and all communities affected by, and living with HIV and AIDS,
- To seek legislative and social reforms that further the protection of and improvement of the livelihoods of sexual minorities,
- To dialogue with African local traditional, political and religious institutions to promote human dignity,
- To eliminate colonial sodomy laws and to oppose attempts to further criminalised sexual minorities.

We call on all Africans on the continent and in the diaspora

- To respect the human rights of all people including sexual minorities,
- To oppose and desist from violence directed toward sexual minorities, and to support families and communities of sexual minorities.

We call on the international community and partners

- To respect while supporting Africa's journey and processes towards a better understanding of human sexuality and socio-economic, political and religious inclusion of sexual minorities,
- To denounce all misleading information on issues of human sexuality.
- To support our commitment to produce and disseminate scholarly and general publications throughout Africa and beyond.

We, African religious leaders, scholars, and members of Civil Society assembled in this KwaZulu Natal consultative gathering commit to uphold these recommendations. We also commit to share this vision with all partners and Africans across the continent and the diaspora and to be inclusive in our journey toward a better understanding and respect of the diversity of human sexuality through research, advocacy, publications and consultations."

"The only way I will rest in peace is if one day transgender people aren't treated the way I was My death needs to be counted in the number of transgender people who commit suicide this year. I want someone to look at that number... and fix it. **Fix society. Please.**" (Extract from Leelah Alcorn's (17) note, left after her suicide in Ohio on 28th December 2014)

Conclusion

Paul sums up our predicament in 1 Corinthians 13: 12-13.

"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

Since not one of us understands fully yet, let us continue to seek God's face with humility.

Let us do so with openness to learn from each other and from the pain of people in the LGBTI community, as we learn daily what it means to live out God's call to love with hope and open the doors of our faith communities to all, regardless of their sexual identity or orientation.

"The church has waged the culture war, and it's time to put the weapons down". Alan Chambers

Resources

Reading Material (books including fiction), articles, pamphlets and booklets.

- ActionAid, 2009. *Hate Crimes: The Rise of 'Corrective' Rape in South Africa*. London: Hamlyn House.
http://www.actionaid.org.uk/doc_lib/correctiveraperep_final.pdf
- Arnfred, Signe.2004. *Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa*. Uppsala, Sweeden; Nordic Africa Institute.
- Beattie Jung, Patricia & Ralph F. Smith. 1993. *Heterosexism: an ethical challenge*. State University New York.
https://books.google.be/books/about/Heterosexism.html?id=mF6HbN7HGNIC&redir_esc=y.
- Cheng, P.S. 2011. Radical love. *An introduction to Queer Theology*. New York: Seabury Books.
- Di Silvo, L. 2011. "Correcting Corrective Rape: Carmichele and Developing South Africa's Affirmative obligations To Prevent Violence Against Women." Georgetown Law Journal, 99(5):1469-2011
- Bishop Michael Doe, 2000. *Seeking the Truth in Love- The Church and Homosexuality*. Darton Longman Todd, London.
- Epprecht, Marc.2008. *Heterosexual Africa: the history of an idea from the age of exploration to the age of AIDS*. Athens, OH:Ohio University Press.
- Eugenides, Jeffrey. 2015. *Middlesex* - A novel about being intersex
- Germond, Paul and Steve de Gruchy, eds.1997. *Aliens in the household of God: homosexuality and Christian faith in South Africa*. Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip.
- Van Klinken, Adriaan. 2013. *The Homosexual as the Antithesis of 'Biblical Manhood'? Heteronormativity and Masculinity Politics in Zambian Pentecostal Sermons*. In Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa Vol. 17 No 2 (December 2011), referring to an interview with Bishop Joshua Banda, Lusaka: 6th November 2008.
- Wright Knust, Jenny, 2011. *Unprotected Texts: The Bible's Surprising Contradictions about Sex and Desire*. HarperCollins.
- _ *True Union in the Body?*- A contribution to the discussion within the Anglican Communion concerning the public blessing of same-sex unions, commissioned by Archbishop Drexel Gomez, Archbishop of the West Indies.
- _ *Being Human - A Christian understanding of personhood illustrated with reference to power, money, sex and time*. Report of the Doctrine Committee of the General Synod of the Church of England, Church House, London, 2003. P80
- _____.2008. *Unspoken Facts*. A History of Homosexualities in Zimbabwe: GALZ.

Resources available from IAM (retha@iam.org.za or 021 975 8142)

DVDs			
	NAME	Short introduction	Language available
1.	Created in the Image of God	LGBTI stories and contributions from leading theologians including Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu.	English
2.	Ter wille van ons kinders	The journeys of parents with their gay or lesbian children especially within the Dutch Reformed Church.	Afrikaans with English subtitles
3.	There comes a time...	A Methodist documentary on same-sex marriages.	English

Book & Booklets & Manual & Reports			
	NAME	Short introduction	Language available
1.	The Bible and Homosexuality? What is the Spirit saying to the Churches?	This booklet is written by Bishop David Russell who addresses fellow Anglicans. The foreword was done by Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu	English
2.	The Bible and Homosexuality (bilingual booklet)	This booklet conveys information with regards to rules of interpretation, cautions, the core message, role of the Holy Spirit and the anti-gay Scriptures. The foreword was done by Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu	English & Afrikaans
3.	Miriam Dancing (available in Afrikaans & English)	A book written by Elise van Wyk in which 28 lesbian, bisexual and transgender women share their true life journeys with spirituality and sexuality. This initiative was also partly funded by IAM.	English & Afrikaans
4.	Journey with God	In this manual you can focus on sexuality and spirituality and work through the numerous challenges with regards to homosexuality and the Bible. From individuals to groups.	English
5.	First African Conference 2009	This report gives detailed feedback what happened at The First African Conference, where 77 participants from 13 African countries participated. You can also read the papers of the speakers.	English
6.	Patriarchal Conference 2009	The Evil of Patriarchy in Church, Society and Politics, a report on the rejection of masculine hierarchy and repression; it focuses on a new masculinity and femininity.	English
7.	Gay & Gelowig	This book was written by Pieter Oberholzer and Carel Anthonissen after a 4 year research. It reflects true life stories and touches the core issue of being gay and a believer.	Afrikaans
8.	Jubilee Report 1995 - 2009	Reflecting back on the first 10 years of IAM's existence.	English

Book & Booklets & Manual & Reports			
	NAME	Short introduction	Language available
9.	Transgender Day of Remembrance, 2014	Report: Social dialogue on transgender learners in the South African Education system, held on 20th November 2014, at Constitution Hill.	English

Leaflets			
1.	IAM Brochure (English)	Information on what IAM as an organisation do and stand for.	
2.	Slavery, Homosexuality and Women – texts in context (English)	Written by David Russell and reflects on Scriptures with regards to Homosexuality, Women and Slavery, bringing the issues surrounding it into context.	
3.	Human Sexuality & The Bible	An informational leaflet focussing on "What is the Holy Spirit saying in our time?"	
4.	Human Sexuality	An informational leaflet focussing on "Why Christians should talk about it?"	

Websites

First African gay and lesbian website: The website <http://whereloveisillegal.com/> launched on June 4th 2015 carries stories of LGBTI persons from all over the world.

Evangelicals Concerned Inc – <http://www.ecinc.org/Scriptures/clbrpg.htm>

Whosoever.Org – <http://www.whosoever.org/bible>

GayChurch.Org – http://www.gaychurch.org/Gay_and_Christian_YES/

GayChristians.Com – <http://www.christiangays.com/education.shtml>

Soul Force – <http://www.soulforce.org/article/homosexuality-bible>

Religious Tolerance.Org – http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibl.htm

Gay Christian 101 – <http://www.gaychristian101.com>

Gender Diversity - <http://www.genderdiversity.org/>

Organisations

Gay and Lesbian Network - director@gayandlesbiankzn.org. 0027 (0)33 342 6165

Durban Lesbian and Gay Organisation - www.gaycentre.org.za 0027 (0)31 312 7402

OUT LGBT Wellbeing - neld@out.org.za. 0027 (0)12 430 3272

Scalabrin Centre - corey@scalabrin.org.za - 0027 (0)21 465 6433

Sonke Gender Justice - Angelica@genderjustice.org.za, 0027 (0)11 339 3589

Triangle Project - www.triangle.org.za; 0027 (0)21686 1841 Helpline 0027 (0)21 712 6699 Staff

Free Gender - freegender.wordpress.com

Gender Dynamix. Cape Town - www.genderdynamix.org.za. 0027 21 6335287

CABSA - www.cabsa.org.za. 0027 (0)11 796-6830

Health for Men - www.health4men.co.za.

Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation – www.desmondtutuhivfoundation.org.za. 0027 (0)21 650 6966

Intersex SA – www.intersexsa.org.za . 0027 (0)21 447 3803

IAM (Inclusive and Affirming Ministries) – www.iam.org.za . 0027 (0)21 975 8142

Other Sheep in Africa – www.othersheep.org (Branches in different countries)

INERELA+ - www.inerela.org . 0027 (0)11 792 7029 (Branches all over Africa.)

There are **student gender diversity organisations on many campuses. Google:** 'gender diversity organisations at South African universities'

Churches

Gay friendly churches:

The IAM website contains an overview summary of progress made in 4 of the liturgical churches: Anglican, Methodist, United Reformed and Dutch Reformed. www.iam.org.za

Ark of Joy in Mpumalanga, Ark of Joy. Sibusiso Makhathini KaMasuku +27 (0)82 223 5483

Deo Gloria (Mpumalanga and Durban). Pastor Debbie Bell. www.deogloria.org Tel. +27 (0)84 586 0843

House of grace. Pastor Sikhumbuzo Sibisi. pastorsibisi@gmail.com. +27 60 601 9116

House of Prayer and Worship MCC. RevNokuthula Dhladhla. rosebuddza@yahoo.com mobile 073 183 1853 or 081 526 5890.

Metropolitan Community Churches – in Africa (Kenya, Nigeria are the newest branches)-

www.mccchurch.org/africa-network/

www.mccchurch.org/overview/ourchurches/find-a.../africa-church-listings/

Mainline churches in South Africa that are inclusive:

Brackenfell, Cape Town DRC Congregation – Pastor Michelle Boonzaier, mrboonzaier@mweb.co.za

Central Methodist Church in Cape Town

Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Wits University, Braamfontein, Johannesburg. Fr Russell Pollitt SJ

St David's Anglican Church, Prestbury, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Rev Tracy Bell.

There are probably many more churches that are open to sexual diversity. A useful resource to use to find out what churches are around your area, is:

<http://iamgay.co.za/spiritual/gay-friendly-churches-in-your-area/>.

Alternatively, **contact your nearest Gay and Lesbian or related organisation for names of LGBTI friendly churches.**

Attachment 1:

Public apology of Exodus International's President

on June 19th 2013

Background: Based in Orlando, Florida, Exodus International was founded in 1976m and set up 260 member ministries around the U.S. and abroad. It offered to help conflicted Christians rid themselves of unwanted homosexual inclinations through counselling and prayer, infuriating gay rights activists in the process.

Alan and Leslie Chambers, married for 18 years...have been featured on most major media outlets in the world related to Alan's personal story as a Christian with same-sex attractions, their unlikely union, and his work. From 2001 to 2012 the Chambers led Exodus International, the world's largest network of ministries for people impacted by homosexuality.

On June 19, 2013, together with their core team of leaders and board of directors Chambers renounced the organisation's mission and closed it in a nearly hour-long talk at the organisation's 38th annual meeting. He co-founded *Speak Love* with two other former Exodus leaders and his wife later that year.

Their mission: "*We serve in our pluralistic culture by hosting thoughtful and safe conversations about faith, gender, and sexuality; and partnering with others to establish trust, reduce fear, and inspire hope.*"

"To Members of the LGBTQ Community:

.....

Never in a million years would I intentionally hurt another person. Yet, here I sit having hurt so many by failing to acknowledge the pain some affiliated with Exodus International caused, and by failing to share the whole truth about my own story. My good intentions matter very little and fail to diminish the pain and hurt others have experienced on my watch. The good that we have done at Exodus is overshadowed by all of this.

Friends and critics alike have said it's not enough to simply change our message or website. I agree. I cannot simply move on and pretend that I have always been the friend that I long to be today. I understand why I am distrusted and why Exodus is hated.

Please know that I am deeply sorry. I am sorry for the pain and hurt many of you have experienced. I am sorry that some of you spent years working through the shame and guilt you felt when your attractions didn't change. I am sorry we promoted sexual orientation change efforts and reparative theories about sexual orientation that stigmatised parents. I am sorry that there were times I didn't stand up to people publicly "on my side" who called you names like sodomite—or worse. I am sorry that I, knowing some of you so well, failed to share publicly that the gay and lesbian people I know were every bit as capable of being amazing parents as the straight people that I know. I am sorry that when I celebrated a person coming to Christ and surrendering their sexuality to Him that I callously celebrated the end of relationships that broke your heart. I am sorry that I have communicated that you and your families are less than me and mine.

More than anything, I am sorry that so many have interpreted this religious rejection by Christians as God's rejection. I am profoundly sorry that many have walked away from their faith and that some have chosen to end their lives. For the rest of my life I will proclaim nothing but the whole truth of the Gospel, one of grace, mercy and open invitation to all to enter into an inseverable relationship with almighty God.

I cannot apologise for my deeply held biblical beliefs about the boundaries I see in Scripture surrounding sex, but I will exercise my beliefs with great care and respect for those who do not share them. I cannot apologise for my beliefs about marriage. But I do not have any desire to fight you on your beliefs or the rights that you seek. My beliefs about these things will never again interfere with God's command to love my neighbour as I love myself.

You have never been my enemy. I am very sorry that I have been yours. I hope the changes in my own life, as well as the ones we announce tonight regarding Exodus International, will bring resolution, and show that I am serious in both my regret and my offer of friendship. I pledge that future endeavours will be focused on peace and common good.

Moving forward, we will serve in our pluralistic culture by hosting thoughtful and safe conversations about gender and sexuality, while partnering with others to reduce fear, inspire hope, and cultivate human flourishing."

<http://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article321695/Christian-group-Exodus-International-apologises-to-gay-community-shuts-down.html#storylink=cpy>
<http://alanchambers.org/exodus/>



Attachment 2: Contextual Bible Study on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19)

Re-Reading the Story of Sodom and Gomorrah:

An UJAMAA Contextual Bible Study

NOTE: Facilitators not used to the Contextual Bible Study method should read Practical Tool 2 in the Gender Transformation Toolkit for Churches, to understand the approach before leading this process.

1. Listen to Genesis 19:1-13. This story has often been used to address the issue of homosexuality. In groups of two, share how this story been used to address the issue of homosexuality in your context.
 - Let's study the story more carefully. What is this story about?
2. This story is part of a larger story which begins in Genesis 18. The story begins with three men visiting Abraham.
 - How does Abraham receive these strangers in Genesis 18:1-8?
3. On the same day, in the evening, two of these men leave Abraham's home and journey towards Sodom (Genesis 19:1-3).
 - How does Lot receive these same strangers (who are described as both 'angels' in 19:1 and 'men' in 19:5)?
4. The men of Sodom, in contrast, do not receive the strangers/angels with hospitality. Instead, they insist on raping/'knowing' the strangers. Why do they choose to 'receive' these strangers by raping them?
5. What is Lot's status in the city of Sodom? What does his status among the men of (19:9) tell us about why the men of Sodom threaten to rape him?
6. In what situations/contexts in our societies do men rape men? Why do men rape other men?
7. Are men who rape men 'homosexuals'?

Clearly Lot recognises that these are heterosexual men, for he 'offers' his virgin daughters to them (19:8). While Lot's treatment of his daughters as his property to with as he wants is unacceptable, what it makes clear is that Lot recognises that the men of Sodom are intent of using sex to abuse and humiliate. This is a story about rape.

8. Is it important to re-read this text? If so, why?
9. It is important to recognise that this story is not read as a story about homosexuality in other biblical texts that refer to it.
 - How do other Old Testament texts characterise this story? See Isaiah 1:7-17; Ezekiel 16:49-50.
 - How does Jesus characterise this story? See Luke 10:10-12/Matthew 10:14-15.
 - What is the 'sin' of Sodom according to these texts?

Notes

*Please send your feedback for this tool to
gendersa@nca.no or consultancy@pacsa.org.za*