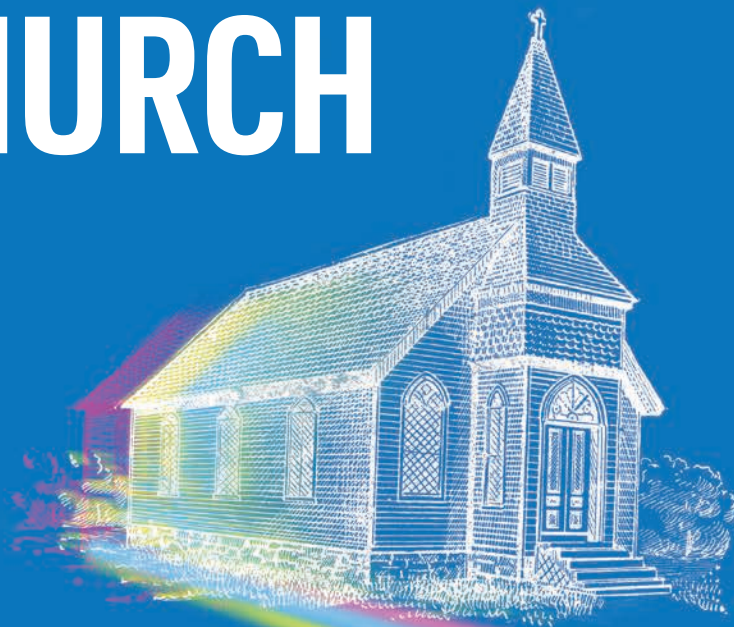


F.A.Q.S



LGBTQIA+

INCLUSION IN THE CHURCH



PREPARED BY:

Compassion, Peace, & Justice + Theology,
Formation, & Evangelism PC(USA) 2022

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to continue to embody the welcoming and inclusive kin-dom of God, we have created this resource to be a helpful tool for churches, mid councils, educational bodies and individuals. This resource was created with LGBTQIA+ people with a lens on diversity and intersectionality. In accordance with the mandates of the General Assembly in 2018, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) celebrates the gifts of all gender identities and sexual orientations in the life of the church and affirms the full dignity and humanity of people of all gender identities. The invitation to the table of inclusion and welcoming expands as the Spirit leads the church to be reformed and always reforming. May this resource be an effective tool for the spread of the gospel to all people.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Being gay is not a sin. How do we know?

Sin is a broad theological term. In classical theological anthropology, every human is subject to sin. The PC(USA) *Book of Confessions* addresses this clearly, and the sin is not limited to “being gay.” If you were born human, then you are subject to sin.¹ The Westminster Shorter Catechism succinctly defines it: “Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.” What is the law of God? The law of God is also a broader term, but it can be well abbreviated to the Ten Commandments.² Jesus summarized these commandments even more briefly into two sentences: Love God. Love your neighbors.³ Nowhere in the law of God do we see the hint of “being gay” as sin. Moreover, if we follow the law of God, we are demanded to love our neighbors, including those who are gay. Most of all, **being the person God created you to be can never be a sin. Your sexual orientation and gender identity are a core part of your being and thus God made you exactly who you are. And being who God made you is never a sin.**

I know my identity and sexual orientation will not send me to hell. How can I convey that to others?

Sin is bound by the law of God. However, the law of God always entails the grace of God. As much as the law of God, and the subject of sin, applies to all, the saving grace of God also applies to all and is universal. That is the core of Reformed theology. Those who have faith in God will receive the saving grace of God. There are no strings attached to the condition of having faith, being elected to be saved and receiving the grace of God.⁴ Hence, while our Confessions mention those “elected,” since we do not know who is elected, God’s saving grace and love remain a mystery beyond human knowledge. In this context, we can say that **eternal damnation is not determined by whom you are romantically attracted to**, and it is not something that humans can decide.

¹ *Book of Confessions*, 3.03. The Scots Confession defines “original sin.” Also, see *Book of Confessions*, 5.037. The Second Helvetic Confession defines “sin.” Lastly, in our *Book of Confessions* 6.036, the Westminster Confession of Faith describes “Every sin, both original and actual.” The Shorter Catechism, from our *Book of Confessions* 7.014, succinctly defines it, “Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.”

² *Book of Confessions*, 4.092. The Heidelberg Catechism reiterates the Ten Commandments.

³ *Book of Confessions*, 4.004. The Heidelberg Catechism reiterates the two greatest commandments based on Matthew 22:37–40.

⁴ *Book of Confessions*, 6.192. The Westminster Confession of Faith states clearly, “The doctrine of God’s eternal decree is held in harmony with the doctrine of his love to all mankind, his gift of his Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and his readiness to bestow his saving grace on all who seek it.”

If God is love, could God ever hate me?

The law of God is love. These two clauses sum up the law of God: Love God and love your neighbor as you love yourself. This love is the core of our relationship with God and with those created in the image of God. We do not see room for hate in this law of love. Hence, no. **God’s love is unconditional.** This love, and the law of love, is not **predicated on your sexual orientation or gender identity.**

See Eugene F. Rogers Jr.’s article, “Can God use sex for our sanctification?” in *Frequently Asked Questions about the Bible, Sexuality, and the Church: Plain Talk about Tough Issues* (Covenant Network, 2006).

WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE SAY?

How does Scripture support LGBTQIA+ identity?

The Bible is mysterious. It shows ambiguous messages about many issues, including but not limited to LGBTQIA+, sexuality, gender, marriage, monogamy, women's leadership, slavery, racial ethnicity and so forth. The biblical authors did not have the same language and labels for many things available in our contemporary life. God inspired the biblical authors, but biblical authors are human. God's words and wisdom are infallible, but humans fall short of it. Hence, reading and understanding the Bible literally has more risk than we think. The Westminster Confession of Faith, however, addresses this risk of changing context, therefore, encouraging Christians to ask the guidance of the Holy Spirit in reading the Bible.⁵ The *Book of Confessions* is not infallible, either. We need to reinterpret both the Bible and the Confessions in our modern context, and retranslate their old languages into more relevant contextualized understanding. As was the case with Luther, our understanding of the Bible and tradition can also be reformed by translating them into proper languages. In these readings and interpretations, what we need most is the guidance of the Holy Spirit. With this, we know the law of God is love. This love is explicit in the Bible. Albeit mysteriously, **the Bible supports everyone living into how you were fearfully and wonderfully created.**

What Scripture do you direct members of the LGBTQIA+ community to if/when they come to you?

Any that are centered on love. We are far too readily centered on a condemning framework for those who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community, instead of an approach that centers love and affirmation. We must remember the humanity of all people is prominent before we ever enter into any dialogue around what may divide us into subcategories. "Therefore, we would direct anyone, particularly LGBTQIA+ individuals, to the love of God and the openness of Jesus who reminds us that all are welcome at the table of inclusion and acceptance.

⁵ See the first chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Particularly, *Book of Confessions*, 6.007. "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them." Also, see 6.010, "The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture."

Additionally, Paul's language in Romans asserts that: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all Creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ ... Jesus our Lord."

Further, in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, the eunuch's identity as a eunuch is never discussed in the passage. Philip never tells the eunuch they need to not be a eunuch in order to be baptized. Yet, the eunuch is baptized and goes on their way rejoicing, carrying the message of the gospel internationally. The fact that the story of the Ethiopian eunuch is the story told about the start of the church moving more broadly into the world actually indicates a favored status for those people society has rejected.

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND INTERPRETATION

How does the Bible support the inclusion of all God's people?

The Bible is indeed mysterious. The Word of God, and the saving grace of God, are mysterious. However, the Law of God is clear: Love God and love your neighbor as you love yourself. How the Word and the law of God reveal and happen in our lives is a mystery. Therefore, we need to approach the Word of God with a prayerful heart asking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. By praying and asking the

wisdom of the Holy Spirit, we can avoid jumping into quick judgments and unexamined conclusions.⁶ Also, in those moments of praying, we may see that the law of God is speaking to us loud and clear, although it may still remain mysterious to our human knowledge. Remember the law of God? Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

The Bible has a very clear theme of love and welcome. That is simply all that our Reformed theology and confessions encourage.

What about interpretation?

Each book, chapter and passage of the Bible was written, redacted and inserted in a specific historical and cultural context. Hence, the interpretation of the Bible requires the utmost effort, concentration and energy. However, the Word of God in the Scripture stands as infallible.⁷ The Scripture is veiled by numerous layers of historical, cultural and linguistic limitations, which we need to discern as humans. But the Word of God stands faithful. The law of God as the love of God stands. We trust that Word, law and love, not the human words and interpretations. What we trust is not our interpretation, but the Holy Spirit who guides us in recognizing the Word, law and love revealed to us.

See William C. Placher's articles, "What do Presbyterians believe about the authority of Scripture?", "Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture" and "Biblical Authority and Interpretation Bible, Sexuality, and the Church."

⁶ See Chapter 1 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, particularly 6.005–6.010

⁷ *Ibid.*

NATURE OF GOD, IMAGE OF GOD

Does God have a gender?

Our understanding of God is so finite that it is completely impossible to restrict God to the categories that we have invented to classify humanity. According to the 1998 PC(USA) Study Catechism⁸, just because the creed speaks of "God the Father," it does not mean that God is male. God is not bound to human knowledge, human language

or any creaturely bodies, "since by nature God is Spirit." Once we restrict God into a certain image and shape, we may commit idolatry. However, if we **are all made in God's image, it is possible that we may address God with a variety of genders and gender expressions.**

Gender is a human-made construct. God does not have a gender. We as humans use gendered language to talk about God because we are humans and are finite in our language and understanding and having gendered language for God enables us to engage God in a particular way.

It is okay to use a variety of gendered and non-gendered language for God, right?

Yes, it is. There is not one right way to address God, either. **God is not limited by our language and encompasses all of our gender identities.** But **we know that we are ALL created in God's image, thus all genders are represented in the essence of God.**⁹

⁸ *The Study Catechism, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1998, Question 11.*

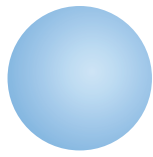
⁹ *See the Directory for Worship, W-1.0302, which calls for expansive language for God, in accordance with the biblical witness. See also question 11 of the PC(USA) Study Catechism (above).*

DENOMINATIONAL POLICY AND POLITY

How does our denomination publicly support LGBTQIA+ siblings?

The denomination's current position was approved by the 223rd General Assembly in 2018. The following statement is the denomination's theological position regarding the LGBTQIA+ community in a nutshell:

"Standing in the conviction that all people are created in the image of God and that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for all people, the 223rd General Assembly (2018) affirms its commitment to the full welcome, acceptance, and inclusion of transgender people, people who identify as gender non-binary, and people of all



gender identities within the full life of the church and the world. [...] The assembly affirms the church's obligation to stand for the right of people of all gender identities to live free from discrimination, violence, and every form of injustice.”

This denomination's position is grounded on our Bible and Confessions mentioned above. **God is love.** The law of God, the Word of God and the saving grace of God is love. “Justice is what love looks like in public.” **God loves you. Where there is love, God is present.**

Bible, Sexuality, and the Church. See Su Yon Pak's article, "What do Presbyterians teach about sexuality?"

How does our denomination affirm the freedom and autonomy of identity?

The Confession of 1967 states, “The church, as the household of God, is called to lead [people] out of [their] alienation into the responsible freedom of the new life in Christ. Reconciled to God, each person has joy in and respect for [their] own humanity and that of other persons.”¹⁰ Sexuality is one way we express our love to God, love of our neighbors and love of ourselves created in the image of God. However, sexuality is not the only way of love. As much as it is not our job to police someone's sexual orientation, gender expression or gender identity, it is our mandate to love one another in a manner as Christ loves us. While the church affirms various forms of love, we do not condone “exploitation” of sexuality that can entail “alienation from God.” The church affirms the love of all forms that exhibit “responsible freedom,” “mutuality,” “grace,” “compassion” and “respect” in the life of Christ. The church believes that such a way of love of Christ can show in all forms of love.

How do LGBTQIA+ marriages represent the Christian vision of marriage, that being a metaphor for Christ's relationship to the church (his bride)?

In the history of Christianity, the church was often described as the bride to Christ. Also, many clergies of all gender identities symbolically dedicated their life as “bride” to Christ in monastic settings. This is not just medieval mystical

tradition, but also can be found in the Reformed tradition, as we often compare the church as the bride and Jesus the groom.¹¹ Hence, the symbolic metaphor applies not only to LGBTQIA+ marriages but also to all marriages regardless of gender. The Christian vision of marriage is indeed a complex issue, as it has changed drastically over time. As a human institution, the church and Christianity are facing ongoing challenges in this regard of reinterpretation.

The Bible has several examples of sanctioned marriage that show up in a variety of ways. As mentioned earlier, **what IS reflected is mutual love and respect for one another as we would expect in any marriage.**

¹⁰ *Book of Confessions, 9.47*

¹¹ *Refer to the Second Helvetic Confessions in the PC(USA) Book of Confessions, particularly section 5.130.*

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

How can I be a good ally to our LGBTQIA+ siblings?

We care as Christians who follow the Word of God and the law of God, which is the love of God and love of our neighbors as we love ourselves. Led by the Holy Spirit, Christ summarized and showed such love to us. Christ did not have to care for those who abandoned and murdered him. And yet, Christ died for us all regardless of our political positions, racial backgrounds and sexual orientations. Christ knew that **diversity is an important part of humanity and the beauty of God's Creation. We have to be open to welcoming those who may be different from ourselves in the same way Christ, as the Word of God, shows us about welcoming a stranger. Just because you think there are no LGBTQIA+ people around you does not actually mean they do not need your care and love.**

How can I make sure that being supportive does not mean being harmful?

In actions of the PC(USA) General Assembly we have stated that we will affirm and celebrate the diversity of all sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions. We don't realize how much our culture celebrates cisgender/

heterosexual identities until we are asked to uplift all orientations and gender expressions. It is important for all in the Body of Christ to know and feel loved and affirmed and not forsaken and forgotten.

How can I recognize my own bias even when someone I love is a part of the LGBTQIA+ community?

Someone else's identity does not dictate your own inherent biases. Unlearning prejudiced thoughts, patterns and behaviors is a constant act of awareness and openness to our own struggles and strength to be better than we were yesterday. It's the same for race, physical ability, economic levels, education, etc.

See Miguel A. De La Torre's article, "A La Familia ..." The full resource is available here: <https://covnetpres.org/resources/sexuality-sexual-orientation/>

Share how our theology can be affirming of LGBTQIA+ civil rights.

One can have a different sociopolitical commitment from their theological belief if one chooses to do so and if that doesn't bother the coherence and consistency of their worldview and lifestyle. None of us is in the authoritative position are in the authoritative position to judge how others behave and choose to live. However, it will be very difficult to live in such inconsistency. **It is our theological understanding of God as love and the call to love one another that calls Christians into a place of welcome to all.** Therefore, it is more likely, if they advocate **for the civil rights of LGBTQIA+ folks then they are an advocate for the justice of all.** And if you follow the law of God as the love shown in the life of Christ, **then your theology**

already is reflective of your advocacy, thus, they better go hand in hand.

See J. Herbert Nelson, II's article "How does the struggle for full inclusion of gay and lesbian Christians relate to the civil rights movement ..." in Bible, Sexuality, and the Church.

Do I have to be on one side or the other? Can I sit on the fence and not cause any harm to anyone?

Again, one may have freedom in choosing, discerning and enacting the love of God, the law of God and the justice of God as saving grace. Likewise, while the denominational position above is clear, the PC(USA) and our Reformed tradition make room for a variety of viewpoints and interpretations. One may need to commit to whichever form of love and justice when they are ready to commit. The church may not impose the moral mandate to individuals, but we can encourage, invite and welcome those who are ready to make commitments to the covenantal relationship of love and justice. **We all have free will and the ability to discern what God is speaking to our spirits. However,** "justice is what love looks like in public."¹² **Thus, not supporting the Micah 6:8 mandate to do justice is not exemplifying love ... and God is love.**

¹² Cornel West

This resource is the collaborative effort of the Office of Gender & Racial Justice and the Office of Theology & Worship within the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

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