

GetToKnowUsFirst

IN FAITH

GetToKnowUsFirst.org

Marriage Equality DVD Screening & Discussion Guide

What You Will Need

- Television or projector and DVD player
- DVD: *Get To Know Us First IN FAITH*
- Sufficient copies of the handout, *Biblical References to Homosexuality*
- 60–90 minutes

This program is designed to work for any size group. Some will choose to present it to the whole congregation in the sanctuary or parish hall. Others may choose to use a smaller classroom setting and arrange chairs in a circle to facilitate discussion. It is even possible to treat this as an online event, as the materials are available to stream and download at www.GetToKnowUsFirst.org

Elements of a Successful Event

- Proper advance notice and promotion
- Normalization of the topic
- Understanding of mutual respect
- Reflective listening and support of participants

Use the *Screening Flyer* (on the DVD) or make your own. Post and distribute these notices a week or so before the event. Include a brief description in congregation e-mails and printed bulletins.

Homosexuality is a taboo subject for some, but not necessarily everyone. As with all educational programs, it is helpful to present the content in as neutral a manner as possible. It is important for those with strong opinions to express them, but they should not dominate or distract from group participation. At the beginning, establish a group consensus for the basic ground rules of mutual respect and equal participation.

Whether presenting to a large group or within a more intimate gathering, it is important to engage the audience with collective and individual questions, so that it becomes a discussion, as opposed to a lesson. The facilitator can employ reflective listening to increase participation.

Event Flow

1. Welcome/Discussion of ground rules
 2. For DVD Chapters 1–3:
 - Introduce chapter
 - Pause DVD and discuss chapter
 3. Closing
- You may choose to incorporate one or more of the additional clips, depending on available time. Enclosed in this kit and at our website are a number of valuable resources to draw from. *Living Lovingly* is a study guide that will allow in-depth exploration of Marriage Equality from a faith perspective.

DVD CHAPTERS

1. Authentic Stories of Marriage Equality 11.5 min (total)
 - A. GetToKnowUsFirst.org PSAs 4 min
 - B. 13LoveStories.org profiles 7.5 min
2. Biblical References to Homosexuality 10 min (total)
 - A. NAACP Chairman, Julian Bond 6 min
 - B. *For the Bible Tells Me So:*
Sodom and Gomorrah 4 min
Chapter 2B is not intended for young children.
Please view all materials before holding your event.
3. Faith Leaders Speak on Marriage Equality
To Have and To Hold 5.5 min

ADDITIONAL CLIPS

- A. *We the People* (AllOrNotAtAll.org) 1 min
- B. Overturn Proposition 8 PSAs (EQCA) 1 min
- C. *Fidelity* (Courage Campaign) 4 min
- D. *For the Bible Tells Me So:*
Is It a Choice? 4.5 min
- E. *For the Bible Tells Me So:*
Focus on the Family 11 min

AFTER YOUR EVENT *Please assist us in tracking the effectiveness of these materials. Go to:*

www.GetToKnowUsFirst.org/infaith.html

1. Register your discussion.
2. Complete the online survey.

Part 1 Welcome

Welcome to our Screening & Discussion about Marriage Equality. Thank you for making time to discuss an issue that is important not only to our gay and lesbian friends and family members, but to our congregation.

We will watch video selections profiling gay and lesbian couples speaking about why Marriage Equality is important to them and to their families. Then, we will discuss the relevant passages of the Bible that appear to reference homosexuality. The materials will guide us through the program, but there will be time for each of us to speak up and share our thoughts. It is through this exchange, as we relate the materials to our own lives and the lives of our loved ones, that we will find the most value for our congregation.

Feel free to speak extemporaneously, using this sample script as a guide.

Mutual Respect

It is most important to remember that we open this discussion to bring our community together, not to divide it. Some people have strong feelings about Marriage Equality and about homosexuality. Let each of us here commit to maintaining a respectful discussion that allows each of us to keep an open mind and to hear one another. We are not here to force any one person's opinion on the group. Above all, let us affirm that each person's experience is unique and worthy of respect.

I also want to add that we should not assume anything about anyone who is participating in the discussion today. If you are gay or lesbian and you feel comfortable sharing some of your own experiences with the topic of Marriage Equality or how faith plays a role in your life, I welcome your involvement. I hope that everyone present has the opportunity to learn something and share perspectives on the topic. You need only participate to the extent that you are comfortable.

Our Motivations

► *Tell the group why you are hosting this Screening & Discussion.*

We come to this topic from unique places and I am happy you have chosen to take part.

► Can you share with the group why you are participating?

Part 2 Authentic Stories of Marriage Equality

PLAY DVD CHAPTER 1 11.5 min

Family, Children & Marriage

- What themes do these videos bring up?
- How many of you know someone like the men and women in these videos?
- How are they connected to you—a co-worker, a neighbor, or a member of your family?
- Have they shared with you how the passage of Proposition 8 affected their family?

Exclusion & Isolation

Often, we may not know exactly who is gay or lesbian. For various reasons, people we care deeply about may not feel they can share this with us. It's important to realize, however, that Proposition 8 may have caused great *private pain* for them.

Part 2 *cont'd on page 3*

Part 2 *cont'd*

Times are changing, but it used to be very common that gay and lesbian people would “drop out” of family life, especially if they felt they could not live openly and be respected as an equal member of the family.

- ▶ Do you know someone who has distanced him or herself from you and/or your family?
- ▶ Are they distanced emotionally or geographically or both?
- ▶ Have you ever heard a negative comment about gays or lesbians at work or at home?
- ▶ Have you ever heard a strongly-worded sermon against homosexuality?
- ▶ What types of things have you heard?

God's Inclusive Love

One off-hand remark from a loved one or a faith leader can separate a person from his or her community and ultimately, from faith altogether. As a faith community, we constantly affirm a message of inclusion and God's love for all. By choosing to speak up for equality, we can send a message out to the world, but more importantly, inward to all of the members of our community.

So now, let's look at scripture.

Part 3 Biblical References to Homosexuality

PLAY DVD CHAPTER 2 10 min

There was a lot of information in these videos. I'd like to pass around a handout with an overview of the scriptural passages most often cited to condemn homosexuality.

▶ **Pass out handout: Biblical References to Homosexuality**

- ▶ Who has heard this explanation of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah before—that it's about inhospitality, not homosexuality?
- ▶ Who has heard this explanation of Romans 10:24 in the New Testament—that it's about idolatry?

▶ **Encourage individual volunteers to read passages aloud.**

Have other participants read the analysis aloud.

Encourage a healthy discussion, moving the group through the list.

Translation Errors

As you look at the passages of the Bible's that appear to reference homosexuality, note that history has handed down wisdom and instruction on how to live our lives for God. It was passed down first as oral tradition from person to person, then transcribed. It has been translated and interpreted by many people across centuries—sometimes inaccurately. Look for the cultural context of the passages that have traditionally been used to condemn homosexuality and ask yourself if we have heard the true meaning of God's message.

It is likely that a translator's choice of the male pronoun to describe the visiting angels is wholly responsible for the Sodom story being associated with homosexuality. In fact, Matthew 22:30 indicates that angels are “sexless,” without gender: “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.” If angels do not procreate, there is no need for gender, at least not in the sense of human gender distinctions.

Part 3 *cont'd on page 4*

Part 3 *cont'd*

There was no word for homosexuality in Greek, Aramaic or Hebrew. Sexuality was understood first and foremost through the construct of gender roles. Males were dominant and females were submissive. To the early Christian mind, there was nothing more debasing to a man than to be “feminized” by allowing himself to be submissive sexually. Extending the translation errors of the Sodom story (homosexuality vs. inhospitality), the King James version translates male and female pagans (non-believers) as “sodomites” and “prostitutes.”

Historical Context of Sex

- ▶ What are our modern concepts of recreational sex and procreational sex?
- ▶ For oppressed religious minorities, procreation may well be the mandate of survival. Is that the case now?
- ▶ Do you know married couples who have never had children or cannot?

Part 4 Faith Leaders Speak on Marriage Equality

PLAY DVD CHAPTER 3 5.5 min

These faith leaders share the belief that marriage is good for society and for the individuals getting married, regardless of whether they are straight or gay.

- ▶ How many people here know someone who is gay or lesbian that has had a commitment ceremony, a holy union, or a legal marriage?

Keep your hands up if the ceremony included any involvement of religion.

Civil vs. Religious Marriage

In California, over 18,000 same-sex couples were married between June and November of 2008. The right for them to marry was established by the California Supreme Court’s ruling in May of that year and then ended by the passage of Proposition 8, just six months later.

In May of 2009, in response to an attempt to invalidate Proposition 8, the state Supreme Court upheld the ban on same-sex marriage, but ruled that the 18,000 marriages will be legally recognized.

- ▶ What is the difference between civil and religious marriage?
- ▶ How does this relate to the separation of church and state in our constitution?

Rev. Eric Lee of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference proposes we can understand Marriage Equality as a civil rights issue by answering a simple question. “Who do you go to for a divorce—the church or the state?” He illustrates with examples, “When a marriage is dissolved, the issue of alimony, distribution of property, child support, custody and visitation is determined and enforced by the state, not the church. Marriage is clearly a civil institution.”

- ▶ Does anyone know what the official position of _____ (our church) is on Marriage Equality for gays and lesbians?
- ▶ **Call on someone to read and then explain your church’s position.**
Living Lovingly (enclosed) may be a good reference for this.
Allow discussion, if participants are eager to speak.

Part 5 Extend The Discussion *Optional*

As time allows, you may choose to play the additional clips on the DVD. Here are some questions pertaining to the videos that may help to encourage discussion.

A. *We the People* (AllOrNotAtAll.org) 1 min

- ▶ What do you find most effective about *We The People*? The ad was designed to have a multi-cultural and interfaith appeal. Does it work?

B. Overturn Proposition 8 PSAs (EQCA) 1 min

- ▶ Unlike the other Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on this DVD, the EQCA PSAs address Proposition 8 directly. Is it effective to hear directly from a family that was hurt by Proposition 8?

C. *Fidelity* (Courage Campaign) 4 min

- ▶ *Fidelity* is the result of a grassroots effort of same-gender couples who turned on cameras and appealed to fellow Californians, “Don’t Divorce Us.” Does this feel different from the other, more “produced” PSAs?
- ▶ A lot of signs said, “Don’t divorce our friends” or “co-workers.” How many people here know someone they could imagine taking part in this video?

D. *For the Bible Tells Me So: Is It a Choice?* 4.5 min

- ▶ This whimsical animation introduces popular psychological explanations for homosexuality, as well as scientific studies focused on genes, hormones, and birth order. Does our biblical discussion shift when we add the scientific context?
- ▶ How did you react to the rejection of ex-gay ministries and conversion therapy?

E. *For the Bible Tells Me So: Focus on the Family* 11 min

- ▶ What emotions did you feel when Jake was speaking to the crowd about his parents, who have embraced him as their gay son?
- ▶ Just before the family is arrested for trespassing at Focus on the Family’s headquarters, Jake’s father says, “I’m a Christian. I am a father. I love my family and every day my family is assaulted by Dr. Dobson. We’re going to deliver this letter to Dr. Dobson. It has to stop.” Can anyone think of an instance when family members could stand up for their loved ones in the face of exclusion or discrimination?
- ▶ In the segment about Bishop Gene Robinson, we see differing views on the topic of judging sin. A protester holding a sign that says, “God hates America,” describes Robinson as, “a hell-bound, unrepentant, spitting-in-the-face-of-God sinner who needs this message more than he needs air to breathe and water to drink.” An elderly Episcopal parishioner then says, “We don’t judge who’s a sinner. We leave that up to God.” Most debate over Marriage Equality is not so dramatic. What is an example of this “sin” debate that we’ve heard here in California?
- ▶ Jake’s father suggests that, if he could wave a magic wand and make his son straight, he would *not* do it. Why do you think he said that? What deeper message of diversity is contained in his sentiment?

General Questions

- ▶ This DVD is full of a wide range of PSAs that were created after Proposition 8 passed. During the campaign in fall 2008, the “No on Proposition 8” ads featured legislators and state administrators, but few gay and lesbian people. One concern was that viewers would feel less inclined to support Marriage Equality if they saw gays and lesbians (especially if they have children). Do you agree that these images can galvanize opposition to Marriage Equality?
- ▶ If you were to pick the single most effective image or story in all of the PSAs, which would it be?

Part 6 Closing

Faith communities have become significantly involved in the debate over Marriage Equality for gays and lesbians. Some clergy include Marriage Equality in their sermons. They discuss the imperative to welcome and support the gay and lesbian members of their congregation. They promote socially progressive messages and images of gay families in church materials. Often, this depends on whether there are any “out” members in a particular congregation. In some communities, this can put a lot of pressure on a closeted member.

What We Do as a Congregation

Some congregations choose to hold discussions and screenings, like this one today, in order to take the pressure off of the gay or lesbian individual. In other words, we do not accept only the individual, but the concept of equality in the eyes of God.

- ▶ How can our congregation contribute to this discussion?
- ▶ What is our role, moving forward from this point?

What We Do as Individuals

- ▶ The gay and lesbian families that put together these materials are out in the public eye, so we can get to know them. What can each of us, as individuals, as brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, friends and neighbors, do to extend God’s message that we are all created in His image and we all share the bounty of his love?
- ▶ If our goal is to embody Christ’s love, is there something tangible, an action item, that we can commit to?

Possible Action Items

- I want my kids to know that I will always accept and love them. I will tell them that I came to this discussion and that I believe all people, gay or straight, are loved by God... and by me.
- I will tell my gay friend/neighbor/co-worker how I feel about Proposition 8 and that I believe all people deserve respect.
- I will work within our congregation to spread the message of inclusion and acceptance for gays and lesbians. I will use my faith to spread a message of support of Marriage Equality.

Closing Prayer

- ▶ ***Put the following prayer (or any other of your choosing) up for all to see (projected, written on a board, or distributed on a piece of paper).***

*God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.
There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.
We love because God first loved us.*

1John 4

Thank you for taking part in today’s Screening & Discussion. I appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts with the group, as well.

I would also like to thank the *California Council on Churches* and *California Faith for Equality*, who have made this event possible. The **Get To Know Us First IN FAITH** DVD and printed materials now belong to our congregation and they will remain available for your reference. You can also access many of these materials on their website: www.GetToKnowUsFirst.org

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