



Church Leader Guide

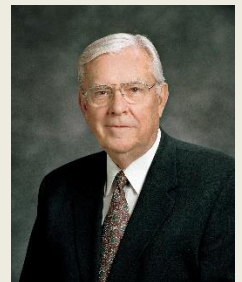
UNDERSTANDING OUR DIFFERENCES A LATTER DAY GUIDE TO LGBTQ+ DISCUSSION

“Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.” – 2 Nephi 31:20

As a church leader, you are a spokesperson for Christ, called to be a voice of love, clarity, understanding and compassion. This is especially true as you teach of Heavenly Father's divine love for all of his children, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. This manual has been created to assist you in better teaching and understanding LGBT topics within your congregation.

“We need to listen to and understand what our LGBT brothers and sisters are feeling and experiencing. Certainly, we must do better than we have done in the past so that all members feel they have a spiritual home where their brothers and sisters love them and where they have a place to worship and serve the Lord.”

M. Russell Ballard | Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



Prepare

This resource manual will guide a fifth Sunday, Sunday School, auxiliary lesson, or combined fireside to facilitate an LGBTQ+ conversation within your congregation.

- How many same-sex attracted (SSA) individuals do you know who are fully integrated into your ward or branch?
- Is your ward or branch a safe and supportive place for them?

Prayerfully study the following scriptures and resources:

- How can you help your congregation desire to follow the Savior's example to love our neighbors as ourselves?

[Matthew 22:37-39](#) (Love thy neighbor as thyself)

[John 13:35](#); [John 15:12](#) (Love one another)

[John 9:1-3](#) (The blind have not sinned)

[1 Nephi 11:16-17](#) (We have limited understanding)

[2 Nephi 26:33](#); [Acts 10:34](#) (All are alike unto God)

[D&C 42:24-25](#) (The law of chastity)

All content from [MormonAndGay.Lds.org](#), especially: "[Frequently Asked Questions](#)"

[Video: An Introduction to MormonAndGay.Lds.org](#) from Elder L. Whitney Clayton

[Video: "The Mackintosh's Story"](#) : Mormon Channel (LDS Production)

[Video: "LGBT People Who Live God's Laws Can Fully Participate in the Church"](#) : Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Introduce

Choose from these ideas to help introduce the lesson:

- How many of us know one or more individuals who experience same-sex attraction—including friends, family, colleagues, or other Church members?
- Can a temple-worthy, active Church member describe themselves as “gay”?
- Do individuals exercise a choice in whether they experience same-sex attraction?
- What can we do to better understand our LGBTQ brothers and sisters?

Understanding the terminology:

Sometimes it is difficult to use words we are not familiar with or accustomed to using. Here is a quick understanding of the term LGBTQ+:

Lesbian. A woman who is emotionally, romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women.

Gay. A person who is emotionally, romantically and/or sexually attracted to members of the same gender.

Bisexual. A person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction to people of their own gender as well as people of an opposite gender.

Transgender. An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Queer. The term is a simple label to explain a complex set of sexual behaviors and desires. “Queer” is generally used as an umbrella term to refer to all LGBTQ+ people.



Discuss

Each of the activities below will help participants increase their understanding of individuals who experience same-sex attraction. Following the inspiration of the Spirit, select one or more that will work best for your ward or branch presentation:

- Show the video [“An Introduction to Mormonandgay.lds.org from Elder L. Whitney Clayton”](#) and ask if anyone is surprised by the message and why.
- Read together [John 9:1-3](#) and ask if this applies to those who experience differing sexual attractions? Read and discuss [“Feelings of Same-Sex Attraction Are Not a Sin and We Can Choose How to Respond”](#) from LDS.org.
- Ask how individuals should respond to a family member telling them they experience same-sex attraction. Show the video extract [“The Mackintosh’s Story”](#) (02:53 – 04:49). Review [“Ten Tips for Parents”](#) from LDS.org.
- Read together [Acts 10:34](#) and ask if it is acceptable for individuals who experience same-sex attraction to take the sacrament, hold callings, and perform temple ordinances? Show the video [“LGBT People Who Live God’s Laws Can Fully Participate in the Church—Elder D. Todd Christofferson”](#)
- Read about the use of sexual identity labels in [“About Sexual Orientation”](#) from MormonAndGay.Lds.org and discuss the importance of understanding what a label means to the individual who elects to use one.
- Read together the final paragraph of [“About Sexual Orientation”](#):
“Attraction is not identity. People can make their own choices about how to identify. There are active, temple-recommend–holding Church members who comply with the law of chastity and identify themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. There are active Church members who experience same-sex attraction and never choose to identify themselves using a label. Our primary identity will always be as a child of God.”

Misconceptions

Prophets, apostles, general authorities and even local church leaders officially taught many incorrect and often problematic statements about LGBT people. Current understanding and revealed experiences have proven many of those statements to be non-factual and misleading. Modern day church leaders, including prophets and apostles have corrected many of these misconceptions. "We must do better", as Elder M. Russell Ballard taught, "to understand the LGBTQ+ topic better than we have understood them in the past."

We can do better by understanding these simple truths:

- Those who experience a sexuality different than your own are not broken or in need of repair.
- Fervent prayers, faithful church attendance, priesthood blessings, temple attendance or mixed-orientation marriages are not viable "cures" or "fixes" to homosexuality or gender dysphoria.
- Homosexuality is not an illness or disease.
- God loves each of his children. He did not create any one of us by mistake. To believe such would require us to believe that God made a mistake in the creation of many of our brothers and sisters.
- Sexuality is not a learned or proselyted behavior. One will not become gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender because of touch, association, discussion or interaction.
- LGBT brothers and sisters did not choose their sexuality any more than you chose your sexuality. Most were aware of their sexuality at an early age. Their choice today is to live a full and well-balanced life, just as their straight brothers and sisters are able to live.
- We do not understand the reason why some people are born gay while others are not. We may never know. It is our responsibility to love and not judge the plan of our Father in Heaven.
- Reparative or conversion therapy is ineffective and harmful.

Support

Is it possible to support LGBT people, even attend the same gender marriages of our friends and family members, and still be good-standing Latter-day Saints? **Yes, it is!**

"Backing marriage equality on social media sites, including on Facebook or Twitter, is not an organized effort to attack our effort, or our functioning as a church."

"Latter-day Saints may hold beliefs even if they are different than what is taught from the pulpit."

"There hasn't been any litmus test or standard imposed that you couldn't support that if you want to support it, if that's your belief and you think it's right."

"We have individual members in the church with a variety of different opinions, beliefs and positions on these issues [LGBT] and other issues,"... In our view, it doesn't really become a problem unless someone is out attacking the church and its leaders — if that's a deliberate and persistent effort and trying to get others to follow them, trying to draw others away, trying to pull people, if you will, out of the church or away from its teachings and doctrines."

All elements of society, "including ourselves, have gained greater understanding, especially in recent years as we've seen more intercommunication, more sharing back and forth, more openness on all sides [on the] social and physical science issues and all the other pieces to the puzzle." The issue is now "coming into focus, but there are still a lot of questions we are seeking added understanding." "We are still learning."

D. Todd Christofferson
Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



Love Better

Being straight, gay, or bisexual is not something that a person can choose or choose to change. In fact, people don't choose their sexual orientation any more than they choose their height or eye color. It is estimated that about 10% of the population identify as LGBT. Queer people are represented in all walks of life, across all nationalities, ethnic backgrounds, and in all social and economic groups. Being gay is also not considered a mental disorder or abnormality. In fact, there are almost as many LGBT people as there are people who are left-handed. To understand that better, on average, 5-8 people in your ward are same-sex attracted. Statistically, people within your own immediate family WILL identify as LGBT.

Although you might not know it now, your son, daughter, husband or wife could experience same-sex attraction. Creating more loving environments have allowed people greater opportunities of sharing their sexuality, or "come-out" as it is commonly known.

Creating a friendly environment in your congregation will foster a place that is comfortable and welcoming to your ward/branch members who want to share their sexuality with you and their church family. For parents, few plan for or expect a child or loved one to "come out." However, each year, thousands of Latter-day Saint families are learning that their own children, relatives and neighbors experience same-sex attraction.

Prayerfully consider ways to make your congregation a place where your own son or daughter could feel welcome to share this important and beautiful detail of their life.

- Create a ward or branch, including auxiliaries that promote love and compassion
- Avoid sharing or "liking" homophobic or transphobic social media posts
- Invite your ward/branch members to share their feelings on these topics
- Slurs, puns, gestures, and statements are noticed by people who remain closeted.
- Ask yourself: if you identified as LGBT, would you feel safe enough to "come out" to your own ward/branch?
- Listen to and learn about real life stories of people who identify as LGBT. When we know better, we will do better
- Avoid pressuring youth, especially young single adults into dating or inquire about their lack of dating prospects
- Understand and live the principle of unconditional love

Resources

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

MormonAndGay.LDS.org | Official LDS resource

This website is an official publication of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on same-sex attraction. It is organized into three key categories: stories, beliefs and understanding.



[Latter Gay Stories | Podcast and Resources](#)

Latter Gay Stories is a candid and open discussion podcast highlighting the many paths families, church members and individuals take to find authenticity within their sexuality, religion, faith and spirituality.



ListenLearnAndLove.org

Listen, Learn & Love is a resource center hosted by Richard Ostler, former bishop and active Latter-day Saint. Bishop Ostler invites you to learn more about LGBTQ+ topics through shared experiences and open discussion.



[Let's Love Better](#)

Former LDS Bishop Paul, and his wife, Susie Augenstein open their home to weekly LGBT activities and firesides. They also feature candid stories about the LDS LGBTQ experience on their *Let's Love Better* Facebook page.



[Affirmation | LGBT Mormons, Families and Friends](#)

Affirmation is the world's largest LDS-LGBT support group. Represented by tens of thousands of participants and family members, Affirmation has chapters covering nations across the world.



[For the Strength of LGBTQ & SSA Youth](#)

For the Strength of LGBTQ & SSA Youth | Designed for LGBTQ youth, allies, and siblings aged 12-18. To join, visit this private community page and send a message from there.