

bi-sex' u-al



**A
Position
of Faith**

leader's guide

**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



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bi-sex' u-al is a program created to encourage dialogue about bisexual orientation and identification.

A Position of Faith is a documentary that tells the story of the first openly-gay person in modern history to be ordained to the Christian ministry, and the process that made it possible.

Both programs are closed-captioned for hearing-impaired persons.

To order the DVD containing both programs, call United Church of Christ Resources at 800-537-3394. Item WCMPB, \$10 plus shipping and handling.

bi-sex' u-al

bi-sex' u-al was created to encourage dialogue about bisexual orientation and identification. This video will not answer all questions about bisexuality. It is an introduction to three individuals through their own stories of faith and sexuality. We hope it will inspire you to think deeply about these stories, and your own story, in the light of faith.

This study guide is designed for use with the video for small group discussions. Read over the study questions and decide which will work best for your group. Plan how you will structure your time. You may choose to watch the video once, discuss some questions and then watch the video again, in part or in whole. Many people will see and hear things they missed the first time, or perceive things differently after some discussion.

Questions for discussion before watching the video

- What is sexual orientation? Is it something you are or something you do?
- Is a person's sexual orientation defined in terms of an individual's self or in terms of their intimate relationships or both?

Bible Study

Read Romans 12. In what ways can we honor the gifts of others that may differ from our own? How is your sexuality a gift of God? When have you felt that one of your gifts from God was devalued or dismissed by another person? How do we present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God?

- Without censoring, what words and phrases come to mind when you hear the word "bisexual?" Try to set aside these notions of bisexuality and look for understandings that arise as you watch the video.

Questions for discussion after watching the video

Identification

All of the individuals featured in the videos identify as bisexual. They also may be identified in many other ways.

- What are the ways we choose to identify ourselves? Make a list of five ways you identify yourself. "I am . . ."
- By what criteria do we identify other people? Are these the same criteria we use to identify ourselves?

- Each of the three people featured in the video have been given a descriptive label (Truth Teller, Witness, Romantic). Where did these come from? How do the labels help you understand more about them or about their perspective?
- Charlotte's partner, Mary Ellen, suggests that many people who identify as heterosexual, gay, or lesbian may be bisexual. Why are these identifications for sexual orientation important? These labels have implications beyond sexual orientation. What are some of those implications?
- What are some reasons bisexual people might choose *not* to identify as bisexual?

Relationships

Two of the bisexual individuals featured in the video are in long-term, committed relationships. Charlotte acknowledges that she is attracted to men and women, but chooses to be in relationship to a woman. John, who is married to a woman, says that he wants to honor the loving experiences he has had with men.

- Is our sexual orientation defined by our current relationship or does it have more to do with our inner selves?
- Can someone be gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual without being in a relationship?
- Does being in a relationship prevent a person from being attracted to other people? How does being in a committed relationship impact your own identification of sexual orientation?
- How do we as human beings maintain commitment to relationships? List the ways you are supported in your commitment to relationship. How does the church support commitment to relationship? Are these supports available for bisexual people?
- How do our understandings of God, scripture, and our Christian faith lived out in community impact our beliefs about relationships?

Monogamy

A concern is raised about how those who identify as bisexual can be in a faithful monogamous relationship. In response, John asks the question, "How can anybody have monogamy? If I am to be questioned then everybody has to be questioned. I think it's about commitment and choice, and that's what I wanted."

- How and why do people choose to be in a monogamous relationship? What are the costs and joys of this choice?

- Can a bisexual person choose monogamy?
- What commitments other than monogamy are important to relationships?

Choice

Darryl states that the choice about sexual orientation is between expression or repression of self. “Are you going to choose that this is really who you are, this is really who God created you to be, or are you going to deny that?”

- Did you chose your sexual orientation? How? When? Why?
- There is growing evidence that sexual orientation is not a choice. If people do not choose their sexual orientation, what choices are involved in expressing our sexuality?
- How do you, or did you, choose to be in a relationship with someone? Did you fall in love? How?
- Does a bisexual person have more of a choice than people of other sexual orientations as to whom they are attracted or with whom they fall in love?
- What does our faith teach us about our own creation? How do we honor our Creator by expressing our true selves?

Sharing Our Stories

- With whom do you empathize or relate most in the video? How are your experiences similar or different from that person’s?
- Was there anything said that you didn’t understand or with which you didn’t agree?
- What more would you like to know? How can you find out?

Bible Study

Read Psalm 139. The Psalmist writes that God knows every part of us, all our thoughts and feelings, and goes on to praise God for having been “fearfully and wonderfully made.” How does this relate to John’s question, “What does it mean to have what’s going on on the inside lived out honestly on the outside?” Which parts of yourself sometimes seem too wonderful or fearful to live out honestly on the outside?

Updates on people and places featured in bi-sex' u-al

Claremont Congregational United Church of Christ in Claremont, Calif., declared itself to be an Open and Affirming congregation in 1994, several years after Charlotte left that church, with the following mission statement:

The purpose of the church is to increase among all the love of God and the love of neighbor. CUCCC is an inclusive church committed to an inclusive humanity. As "A House of Prayer for All People," we celebrate diversity. We are an open and affirming congregation in which all persons regardless of race, ethnic background, economic status, gender, age, personal ability or sexual orientation are equally affirmed into membership, leadership and employment, and joyfully welcomed.

Several months after the completion of this video, on June 16, 2002, the Rev. John Selders' father, the Rev. Jerald D. Ford, entered into eternal life.

The Rev. Darryl Wade Kistler was ordained into Christian ministry by the North Texas Association of the United Church of Christ on Epiphany, Jan. 6, 2002. He currently serves as the pastor of **United Christian Church**, a congregation of both the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), in **Miles City, Mont.**

bi-sex' u-al is a production of the United Church of Christ, made possible by Wider Church Ministries, a Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ.

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A PIC Production.

A Position of Faith

On June 25, 1972, William R. Johnson became the first openly gay person in history to be ordained to the Christian ministry. *A Position of Faith* tells the story of this landmark event and the process that made it possible. The story is poignant and inspirational, and includes a letter from Bill Johnson's mother, interviews with Bill, young people and church leaders (clergy and lay), who either supported or opposed Bill's candidacy.

As you watch this CINE Golden Eagle award-winning documentary, you will hear many of the questions with which the church struggled in the decision making process:

- What should be the determining factor in considering a candidate for ordination?
- How can the church respond faithfully to receive the gifts of ministry of persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)?

Although these questions are still being asked, not only in the United Church of Christ (UCC) but in many Christian denominations, the decision to ordain Bill Johnson has been affirmed by numerous actions of the General Synod of the UCC (the most representative decision-making body of the denomination). The events depicted in this film helped to open the door to ordained ministry for an increasing number of LGBT persons in the UCC. There also are a growing number of congregations and other settings of the church that have declared themselves to be "open and affirming," welcoming all persons, including those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender, into the full life, mission and leadership of the church.

Suggested use of A Position of Faith

- Small Groups and Congregational Meetings
- Personal Home Viewing
- Confirmation Classes and Youth Groups
- Search Committees
- UCC Polity Classes
- Open and Affirming Programs and Celebrations
- LGBT Community Presentations

Note to Group Leaders/Facilitators

This guide is available electronically at <www.ucc.org/lgbt/resources.html>. You also may look at other lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) resources that we have available for your use.

When using this film, the following suggestions may be helpful.

- Preview the film with sensitivity to the “culture” of the group with which you plan to show it. You may wish to view it more than once.
- Read the discussion guide and decide what will work best for your group.
- Plan how you will structure your time and adapt the discussion process as needed.
- You may choose to watch the film once, engage in discussion and then watch the film again. Often, people will see or hear things they missed the first time, or perceive things differently after some discussion.
- Open and close with prayer.

Discuss before watching the film

1. Read and reflect briefly on Isaiah 6:1-8.
2. What does it mean to be an ordained Christian minister?
3. Read and respond to the following definition of ordination from the UCC Manual on Ministry:

Ordination is the rite whereby the United Church of Christ, through an Association and in cooperation with the person and a local church of the United Church of Christ, recognizes and authorizes that member whom God has called to ordained ministry and sets that person apart by prayer and the laying on of hands. By this rite, ordained ministerial standing is conferred and authorization given to perform the duties and exercise the prerogatives of ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ.

4. Look at the process for becoming an ordained minister in the UCC. While this process may vary from Conference to Conference and Association to Association, it involves the following:
 - Education — usually a Master of Divinity or its equivalent, completion of a UCC polity course;

- “In Care” status for at least one year with a UCC Association;
- A call to serve a UCC local church or other setting in covenant with the UCC;
- Ordination paper — including theology, faith journey and understanding of one’s own call to ordained ministry;
- Interview with the Association’s Church and Ministry Committee;
- Ecclesiastical Council of the Association where the candidate makes a presentation and/or preaches and is asked questions by delegates;
- Vote of the Association delegates to approve the ordination;
- The Service of Ordination, in which the vows of ordination are made.

Watch the film

The story of *A Position of Faith* begins just before the Ecclesiastical Council of the Golden Gate Association, Northern California Conference, UCC.

Discuss after watching the film

- What are your initial impressions?
- How do you feel about what you saw?
- What inspired you? What concerned you?
- What issues were addressed, pro and con?
- What are some of the important things churches need to do in order to deal with difficult issues in healthy ways?
- How did people participate in the process of making this decision?
- Why do you think people voted in favor of ordaining Bill to Christian ministry?

Read and reflect on Ephesians 3:7-21

Share your thoughts on these quotes:

On the question of Bill's ordination

“I expect the concern of the people to be primarily my sexuality and I will try to respond to that concern by putting my answers into a theological context.

“I expect a great concern to be that of morality and a serious question that many people have, a question that I respect, is how can we ordain a homosexual when the assumption that we have is that homosexuality is immoral?”

“And I intend to address myself not to the presumed immorality of homosexuality or to the presumed morality of heterosexuality, but to the higher question of morality in regard to sexual relationships.

“Because I deeply believe that we do a great injustice to humanity if we focus in upon one orientation, one sexual orientation, and I believe we need to lift our vision to the morality of what it means to be human.”

— *Bill Johnson*

On taking risks

“Human beings will find themselves in the predicament of taking the position of faith or taking the position of fear. And I have great faith that when it comes right down to a decision that Christian men and women will make the faith position their own.”

— *Bill Johnson*

From the charge at Bill's ordination service

“... I charge you to choose life, to remember what you have learned and to be who you are.”

— *The Rev. Bill Eichorn*

Resources

Print

That We May All Be One, 30 Years of United Church of Christ Social Justice Policy Statements on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns. Item # AMA20; \$5 plus shipping from United Church Resources, (800) 537-3394.

That We May All Be One, Addendum. Free from UCC Wider Church Ministries, (216) 736-3218.

Congregations Talking About Homosexuality: Dialogue on a Difficult Issue. Beth Ann Gaede, Editor. 1999.

Online

UCC Manual on the Ministry

<<http://www.ucc.org/ministers/manual/>>

Bill Johnson Reflects on His Historic Ordination, 30 Years Later

<www.ucc.org/ucnews/june2002bill-johnson-reflects-on-his.html>

Listing of UCC LGBT Resources

<www.ucc.org/lgbt/resources.html>

UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns, Open and Affirming Program and Resources

<www.uccoalition.org/programs/ona/resources>

Acknowledgments

A Position of Faith was originally released in June 1973.

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