

Connecting

You can connect with any of these organizations, to find a chapter or place of worship near you, over the Internet. Just type in the name of the organization into the web search engine. Not all religions have organized groups you can access across the Internet, some just have web-rings of individuals who are GLBT and practice that religion. So, try typing in something like, "gay Hindu" or "gay Tao". Many GLBT positive churches, temples and synagogues will indicate their acceptance with a rainbow triangle, cross, Star of David, etc on their signs or pamphlets. You could also contact the nearest GLBT community centre for information on GLBT positive congregations.

The Avenue Community Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity

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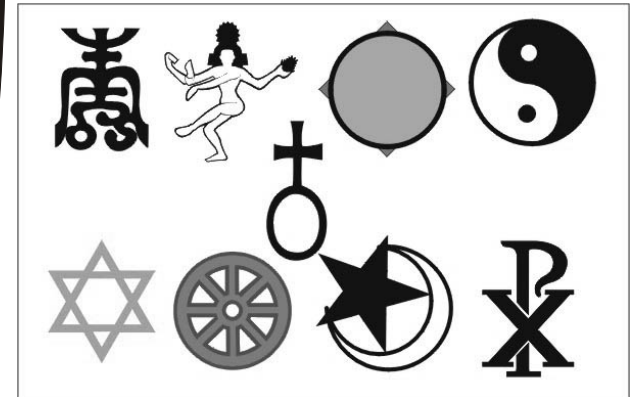
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GLBT Faith Communities



Introduction

It is a fact of life that gay people are everywhere. We are born to every kind of family, culture, race, nationality, class and religion. However, many religions are not always the most welcoming of those who are different. This can be extremely difficult for GLBT people who grew up in a faith community, that community can often be as much a part of our lives as our family was and is. It is never easy to find yourself rejected by those who are supposed to love you. For many GLBT people this means that even though they may get to keep their family, friends and job they have to give up their faith.

People of faith, regardless of their sexual orientation and from many different religious traditions and denominations, believe that being GLBT is okay in the eyes of God. These people have worked very hard at making it possible for openly GLBT people to keep the faith and spirituality they grew up with. Or, failing that at least offer a new faith community where they could reconnect with their spiritual nature.

This booklet lists many of the organizations started by people of faith across a broad spectrum of religious traditions and denominations. It is possible, even likely, that there may not be a chapter of one of these groups where you live or near you. Do not lose heart. You could view a trip, or trips, to one of their services as a kind of pilgrimage. Maybe, they are looking for someone to start a chapter where you are, that someone could be you.

Whatever the situation, this booklet is meant to offer you encouragement and the understanding that just because you are gay does not mean you have to give up your spiritual self. It can be difficult sometimes, but the rewards of having some touchstone for your faith can be a wonderful joy and comfort. Remember, you are what you are because you were meant to be that way, and that is special and not to be undervalued or rejected.

United Church of Canada--Affirm United

Affirm United is an organization of persons working through education and social integration for the welcoming of diverse peoples, especially the inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons in the life and work of the church. The organization also works to address the oppression of gays/lesbians in society as a whole and not just the United Church. Affirm United is composed of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and so it is open to all people within the United Church of Canada who support these goals.

Affirm takes strength for its efforts from the Bible, drawing upon the stories of Exodus and the wandering in the wilderness, Jesus' commitment to marginalized people, as well as the conversion of Peter. From these sources Affirm works to create an inclusive Church, open to all people on their own faith journeys.

Unitarian--Interweave Continental

The mission statement of the Interweave Continental, Inc. is: "Interweave is a membership organization affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), dedicated to the spiritual, political, and social well-being of Unitarian Universalists (UU) who are confronting oppression as lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender persons, and their heterosexual allies; and facilitates the celebration of the culture and lives of its members."

Interweave and the Unitarian Church strives to provide a religious and spiritual base for Us who affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person, regardless of sexual and/or gender identity; to eliminate oppression on the basis of sexual and/or gender identity; to recognize and promote better understanding of the multiplicity of differences among us, and to value those differences; and to acknowledge the existence of institutionalized oppression and develop inclusive models of empowerment, healing, and change within Interweave, the UUA, and society to move us toward the creation of a world of justice, equity, and peace for all.

Pagan--WitchVox & LesBiGay Pagan Network

There are many pagan religions Wicca, Druidic, Norse, Goddess and others. Many of the ancient traditions that the pagan religions are based on are inclusive of GLBT people and some are exclusive to the GLBT community. There are also many New Age philosophies that are also inclusive of the GLBT community. WitchVox and LesBiGay Pagan Network (LPN) are two Internet sites that are dedicated to a range of different pagan religions and traditions. Both sites offer articles and descriptions of the many pagan religions that are inclusive of GLBT people. They also list a calendar of festivals, gatherings and conferences of pagan groups and pagans in general. Like most websites there is a comprehensive list of links to other pagan sites both of groups and individual sites.

Presbyterian--More Light Presbyterians

“We limit not the truth of God to our poor reach of mind by notions of our day sect-crude, partial and confined. No, let a new and better hope within our hearts be stirred, for God hath yet more light and truth to break forth from the Word,” Pastor John Robinson, 1620. Presbyterians who are faithful to God's call also believe that God continues to open new understandings of scripture and the Word in the life of Christ. More Light believes that the Church must seek to live out those understandings in the community and has been working to that end since 1974.

The Mission of More Light is:

“Following the risen Christ and seeking to make the Church a true community of hospitality, the mission of More Light Presbyterians is to work for the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of faith in the life, ministry and witness of the Presbyterian Church.”

Anglican--Affirming Congregations

There has been a great deal of upset in the news about the Anglican Church in Canada and its growing acceptance and inclusion of GLBT Anglicans. From allowing GLBT people to worship and be gay, to gay clergy, to same-sex unions/marriage, the challenge and growth of many parishes to deal with these issues have been quite public. At present there are only three significant Christian faith communities where the leadership is open to and even encouraging of being inclusive of the GLBT parishioners and the Canadian Anglican Church is one of them.

In many Anglican communities the local Church leaders have themselves spearheaded many of the changes that are making the Anglican Church one of the most socially liberal faith communities. While the levels of acceptance varies widely from congregation to congregation and diocese-to-diocese, there is a significant number of affirming congregations where an openly GLBT person can go, worship and be welcome.

Atheism / Humanism--GALAH

Gay And Lesbian Atheists and Humanists (GALAH), is a group of people whose ethics are based on reason rather than ignorance, mythology and fear. GALAH views religion as the greatest oppressor of the GLBT community. GALAH works towards a just secular society.

GALAH actively works at limiting the impact of various religious groups on all levels of government, advocating the complete separation of church and state. GALAH is at present the only group where Atheism and Humanism is advocated for the GLBT community. Its support groups offer an environment where GLBT people who have been abused or attacked by organized religion a place where they can be safe to express and be themselves without fear of backlash or oppression.

Baptist--Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists (AWAB)

AWAB was founded in the early 1990's by a group of American Baptist pastors, who could no longer accept the exclusion of the GLBT community from the Baptist faith. There are now over 50 AWAB Churches across North America, in addition there are many AWAB counselling centres and Church Groups.

AWAB has become a strong presence in Baptist circles where they openly challenge the unchristian sermons against GLBT people being preached from the pulpit. They have worked diligently at increasing the acceptance of GLBT people in congregations and making all those born to or discovering the Baptist Church feels welcome, loved and supported. AWAB also provides counselling services to families with gay members, gay Baptists struggling with their orientation and faith, and educational and scripture workshops on the issue of homosexuality.

Buddhist--Dharma Friends

The Buddhist tradition is one of the oldest traditions. It is one of self-exploration seeking spiritual fulfillment and enlightenment. A key tenet of Buddhist philosophy is the sacredness of all things; from lowest to highest, that everything has a place and important role to play. There is also an aspect of respect of being different and valuing that diversity.

Dharma Friends was founded to support Buddhist mediation and spirituality within the GLBT community. The group incorporates the three major practices of Buddhism Zen, Tibetan and Theravada, and is open to all who are seeking enlightenment and embraces GLBT people as equal. The group hosts retreats and events dedicated to sharing Buddhist philosophy within the GLBT community in Canada. Dharma Friends also maintains links with other GLBT Buddhist groups across Canada.

Multi-Faith--Beliefnet

Beliefnet is a multi-faith e-community designed to help people meet their own religious and spiritual needs in an interesting, captivating and engaging way. Beliefnet is independent. It is not affiliated to any particular religion or spiritual movement. It is not out to convert anyone to a particular approach, but rather to help you find your own. Fundamental to its mission is a deep respect for a wide variety of faiths and traditions.

To these ends, Beliefnet provides information and inspiration. The site has an extraordinary collection of experts and scholars. It offers the spiritual tools such as prayer circles, kits to help you celebrate births, weddings and other life milestones, as well as commemorate deaths. Most importantly, it helps people to learn from each other through a breathtaking array of discussions and dialogue groups. The site regularly offers articles and editorials on a wide range of issues relating to sexual orientation, gender issues, justice issues and even pop-culture issues, all within a spiritual context.

Orthodox Judaism--Ortho Gays

Ortho Gays is a network of various smaller groups that offer support, information and spiritual guidance to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people who are from the Orthodox Judaic tradition. Youth and adults from Orthodox households can find support not only from other GLBT people but also from Rabbis who do not see a conflict in being gay and Orthodox. Many of these Rabbis have themselves struggled with the tenets of Orthodoxy and the reality of the pain of ostracism, isolation, bigotry and hate faced by the gay members of their synagogues. Many see the issue as a point of justice as well as spiritual inclusion.

This segment of the GLBT faith community recently gained a higher profile with the documentary film, "Trembling Before G-d." The film followed the lives of several people who were struggling to reconcile their Orthodox faith with their sexual orientation. It is a very powerful film.

Metropolitan Community Church--MCC

Rev Troy D. Perry founded the first Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in Los Angeles in 1968. The MCC plays a crucial role in addressing the spiritual needs of the GLBT community around the world. Accepting parishioners from a diverse range of faith backgrounds, the MCC offers those raised in a religious family, where being gay was associated with sin and shame, a chance to reconnect with God and explore their spiritual experience in a loving and supportive faith community. Thousands of GLBT people, and straight people too, have found hope and live in the joy reverence and excitement of the MCC's fellowship and faith in God.

Here is the fundamental base of faith in the MCC:

“Christianity is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and is the religion set forth in the scripture. Jesus Christ is foretold in the Old Testament, presented in the New Testament and proclaimed by the Christian Church in every age and in every land.”

Mormon--Affirmation

Affirmation is a fellowship of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, their families and friends who share the common bond of the Mormon experience. Its purpose is to provide a supportive environment for relieving the needless fear, guilt, self-oppression and isolation that Latter Day Saints (LDS) gays and lesbians can experience in an era where wilful ignorance about human sexuality is too often a reality. Affirmation believes that a same-gender sexual orientation and same-gender relationships can be consistent with and supported by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Affirmation affirms that people are the children of heavenly Parents who love us the way they created us and will judge us, as they do all, based on what we make of our lives here and how we have treated our sisters and brothers. Affirmation works on encouraging Christ-like behaviour, reconciling people experiencing difficulty in combining their sexual orientation with their faith, and influencing Church leaders to reject the unchristian attitudes of hate, violence, fear and prejudice towards the GLBT community.

Catholic--Dignity

Begun in 1969, in San Diego, California Dignity is the largest and most progressive lay movement of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) Catholics, their families and friends in North America. By the 1970's Dignity had chapters across the US and Canada. The local chapters offer members opportunities to worship openly, socialize, to share personal and spiritual concerns and work together on educational and justice issues.

Some core values of Dignity are:

We believe that God Created us, Christ died for us, and the Holy Spirit sanctified us in Baptism. We believe that we can express our sexuality in a loving, life-affirming manner that is in keeping with Christ's teaching. Dignity envisions and works for a time when Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Catholics are affirmed and experience dignity through integration of their spirituality with their sexuality, and as beloved persons of God participate fully in all aspects of life within the Church and Society.

Christian--Whosoever

Whosoever is an online magazine dedicated to the spiritual growth of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) Christians. Whosoever seeks to dispel the myths and outright lies spread shamelessly by Christian extremists who seek to keep GLBT people from God's realm. Whosoever's mission is to reach GLBT people around the world and tell them the Good News of God's unconditional love for all people, as shown through the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Through biblical scholarship, personal testimonies and prayerful commentary on timely topics, Whosoever strives to show God constantly at work in the lives of GLBT people. Whosoever is determined to break the bonds of extremist tyranny and rescue the Bible from fundamentalists who use the scripture to exclude and injure God's children.

Islam--Ahabab

Ahabab, is an Internet community of support for Islamic gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. While most chapters are located in North America, there are growing numbers in the Arab world too, despite the injustice of the Cairo 52. (52 Cairo men who were rounded up, humiliated, abused and tried because they were gay.) Ahabab works at helping many gay Muslims to come to terms with being gay and Islamic. For many Ahabab is a lifeline between small GLBT communities scattered throughout the Islamic world and beyond.

The group also offers a place to express concerns of a community that is being attacked from all sides; from fellow Muslims for being gay, from non-Islamic homophobes and from racists who see all Arabs and or Muslims as potential terrorists. Despite all this Ahabab remains positive about the future and the sanctity of being both gay and a follower of Islam.

Judaism--Keshet Ga'avah

The first gay and lesbian Jewish organizations were formed in the early 1970's in the United States, Canada and Europe. In 1976 the first international conference of these organizations was held. By 1980 these organizations collectively became the World Congress and have worked at building bridges between Jews gay and straight. The name was changed in 2001 to: The World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews: Keshet Ga'avah.

Keshet Ga'avah, works to promote diversity among groups and individuals and building ties between the many GLBT communities in Israel and Jewish communities around the world. The vision of Keshet Ga'avah is a world where GLBT Jews worldwide can enjoy free and fulfilling lives. To that end Keshet Ga'avah is the voice of GLBT Jews, works with the Jewish Hierarchy promoting acceptance and inclusion of GLBT Jews into the greater Jewish community and the world in general.

Lutheran--Lutherans Concerned-North America

Lutherans Concerned is a community of faith, modelling the gospel with the Church and within the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities. It seeks to employ the Gospel's principles of inclusiveness and justice, celebrating God's Gifts of sexuality and diversity. The group is an independent membership organization, totally dependant on donations and membership contributions and is open to Lutherans and people from other faith communities.

Here are some central beliefs of Lutherans Concerned:

All people who believe in God, have spiritual needs. We are all wonderfully created in the image of God, part of the full spectrum of His creation, a rainbow of diversity. As Christians we are called to be a model of the Gospel, loving our fellow human beings and promoting justice for all. We seek to lead the Church to live the Gospel to the fullest, affirming sexual diversity, as we all grow in faith and understanding of God's Grace.

Mennonite--Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Interests (BMC)

The BMC works on three aspects of the Mennonite life, community, spirituality and prophetism, to open the faith to its LGBT members. The BMC works to form community through; embracing the Anabaptist heritage, forging an inclusive organization and environment, providing a graced safe place of caring, support and healing for all persons, and by affirming our sexuality, diversity and humanity. Spirituality is nurtured through the validation of people's existence, being open to one's own faith journey and accepting the strengths and values of the Mennonite heritage, claiming one's spiritual giftedness, and by respecting the right of opinion and faithfulness of others, without denying one's own beliefs. And finally prophetism through: advocating justice for GLBT people, building bridges with other GLBT groups of other denominations, acknowledging the connection between heterosexism and racism, sexism and classism, and by envisioning and living out Shalom.