

Of Love

AND JUSTICE

Toward the Civil Recognition
of Same-Sex Marriage



A Congregational Guide for Study and Action

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Toward the Civil Recognition
of Same-Sex Marriage

Of Love and Justice: Toward the Civil Recognition of Same-Sex Marriage
A Congregational Guide for Study and Action (Version 2)

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

OF LOVE AND JUSTICE TOWARD THE CIVIL RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

In August 2000, the 37th General Council of The United Church of Canada overturned a policy that had been on its books since 1960 which stated that homosexuality is a sin. It reaffirmed that human sexual orientations and gender identities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and heterosexual) are gifts from God, calling them “a part of the marvellous diversity of creation.”

This resource was developed by the Justice, Global, and Ecumenical Relations Unit of The United Church of Canada, in response to this and other resolutions of the 37th and 38th General Council which called on the church to work for the civil recognition of same-sex partnerships, and to recognize them in church documentation and services of blessing, and for the recognition of them in federal marriage legislation.

PART 1: Four Workshops on Civil Recognition of Same-Sex Marriage

The four workshops are designed to help participants understand, integrate, and act on the issue of civil recognition of same-sex marriage. The first three workshops are appropriate for participants with a range of different opinions on this topic who are interested in learning more about the issue and the United Church’s position. The fourth workshop is intended for groups or congregations who are interested in taking action to support the civil recognition of same-sex marriage.

Workshop 1 provides a general introduction, beginning with an understanding of what civil recognition is and why it is significant. This workshop includes personal stories from gay and lesbian people. Participants have opportunities to share their own reactions and concerns as well as their personal experience around this issue. If the participants or the congregation have had no recent or prior opportunity to discuss the issue of sexual orientation in general, more time may be needed at this first step. You might show videos, invite gay and lesbian speakers to talk to your group about relationships and sexuality. See p.71 for additional resources.

Workshop 2 focuses on the faith and theological issues behind the discussion of homosexuality and the civil recognition of same-sex partnerships. Participants have an opportunity to reflect biblically and theologically and to develop their own faith response in light of the United Church position on this issue.

Workshop 3 looks specifically at the issue of civil recognition of same-sex marriage: What is civil recognition? What is the position of The United Church of Canada? What rights, benefits, or protection do same-sex couples have. What needs to change in order for same-sex couples and their families to have the same rights, protection, and recognition as heterosexual couples?

Workshop 4 helps participants identify how they might begin to take action as individuals and as a faith community. They are invited to identify how their congregation can recognize and support same-sex couples and their families and to consider other actions that would support the rights of gay and lesbian people in the larger society, including speaking out.

About the Workshops

Each of these workshops may be done separately. The four workshops may be done sequentially as a four-part series. Or they could be combined into a day-long or weekend event. Each workshop is between 2 and 2½ hours long. For larger groups you may need more discussion time. You will need to build in additional time for breaks, meals, etc. You are encouraged to change or adapt the workshop material to suit the needs of your particular group.

Permission is given to photocopy handouts for workshop participants.

The workshop discussions are designed to encourage reflection and sharing rather than debate or judgement. The intent is to help people grow and learn in a safe and positive atmosphere where all are treated with respect. It may be helpful to remind the group to listen carefully rather than rushing to debate or challenge one another. Point out that it is fine to have differing opinions. You may wish to establish guidelines or ground rules for the group before you begin. It may be beneficial to have facilitators who are prepared in advance to help guide the small group discussions.

The workshops may raise pastoral concerns for some workshop participants. For example, a parent of a gay or lesbian child, someone who is newly acknowledging their sexual orientation, or someone who has recently ended a relationship, may find the workshop surfaces deep feelings. It is important to let participants know at the outset that pastoral support is available to them and how they can access it. Do not force anyone to share more than they wish to in the group discussions, and make sure that anyone is free to “pass” on a question if they wish to do so.

PART 2: Congregational Decision Making on Same-Sex Covenanting

This section of the resource provides procedural information, a decision-making process, and a workshop to help congregations make an informed decision or set congregational policy regarding same-sex marriage services.

This material is intended to help congregations move through a process of education, toward deciding what their particular approach will be to recognizing and celebrating same-sex relationships.

PART 1:

**FOUR WORKSHOPS ON CIVIL RECOGNITION
OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE**

PART 1: FOUR WORKSHOPS ON CIVIL RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

WORKSHOP 1: UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES

Purpose

To increase participants' awareness of the issue of civil recognition of same-sex relationships, what it is, and why it may be important to same-sex couples.

Preparation

- Bring newsprint, flip-chart stand, markers, pens, and *Voices United*.
- Make copies of *Handout 1: Personal Reflections* and *Handout 3: Case Studies*. If you cannot get a speaker, make copies of *Handout 2: Personal Stories*.
- Write discussion questions on newsprint so they can be seen by all of the participants, or copy them onto sheets of paper.
- If this is the only workshop you will be doing, make copies of *Handout 6: Faith Reflections on Same-Sex Marriage* and *Handout 8: The United Church Position*.
- Invite a speaker who can talk from personal experience about the issue of the civil recognition of same-sex couples and why it is important to them. Consult the list of groups and organizations provided in the Resources section (pg. 71). The nearest PFLAG group or a nearby Affirming congregation may have speakers they can suggest or may know of other groups in your area that provide speakers.

WORKSHOP PLAN:

Introduction (10 min.)

Welcome the group and make sure members know one another. Allow time for personal introductions. If you have a guest, introduce that person as well. Review the plan for the workshop and give any logistical information that may be required. If group members know one another well suggest a brief "check in" in which each person can briefly mention a joy or concern that is on their minds as they gather.

Prayer:

Welcoming God,

You invite us into this time and this place, greeting us with loving arms.

Help us to listen with Spirit-filled discernment and to speak with Spirit-filled care.

Help us to hear your voice in the voices of one another and to see your face in the faces of one another. Help us to hear your call to new understanding and witness.

May all that we do and say this day [evening] become part of your work of love and justice and healing in our lives and in our world. Amen.

Individual Reflection (10 min.)

Distribute copies of *Handout 1: Personal Reflections* and invite participants to consider the questions on this handout individually for a few minutes.

Reflect in Small Groups (20 min.)

After individual reflection, invite people to form groups of 3-5 people. Ask them to address the following questions, making sure everyone has a chance to talk. **Encourage people to listen to each other's feelings, stories, and reactions rather than judging or debating. Make sure that people know they need only share as much as they are comfortable with and that they do not need to show their answers to the questions on the reflection sheet.**

- How has the issue of sexual orientation touched your own life?
- What messages did you first receive about homosexuality?
- How have your opinions and feelings about same-sex relationships changed over time?

Discussion: Changes in Church and Society (20 min.)

Ask group members to share what they have heard about recently in the news or elsewhere about same-sex relationships, gay and lesbian rights, or sexual orientation (e.g. changes in laws, stories about gay and lesbian couples, recent court decisions on same-sex marriage, etc.). Record key points on newsprint.

- How do you feel about the changes that are taking place in the church and in our society on this issue?
- What questions or concerns do you have?

Speaker or Personal Stories (20-30 min.)

Invite the speaker to talk to your group about same-sex partnerships and their own experiences as a gay and lesbian person or family member. Your speaker might be someone in a same-sex relationship, a family member such as someone from PFLAG, or someone from an Affirming congregation (see Resource section).

Allow time for questions and responses from the group.

If no speaker is available, have group members read the articles from Handout 2: Personal Stories. Alternatively, you could invite three people from your congregation to prepare ahead of time to present a dramatic version of one of the personal stories or case studies, speaking in the first-person, as though this was their own story.

Introducing the Concept of Civil Recognition (15 min.)

Explain that this workshop series is designed to help congregations understand more about the civil recognition of gay and lesbian relationships. Suggest that one way to think about this is to use marriage as an example of the civil recognition of a relationship.

- What are some of the ways in which our society recognizes and acknowledges the marriage relationship (e.g. a legal document, service of worship, celebration in the community)?

As people suggest ideas, make a list on newsprint.

- What are some of the legal rights, benefits, and protections that married couples enjoy (e.g. tax deductions)?

Make a list of these on newsprint. Explain that some of these rights and benefits are also available to common-law couples, including gay and lesbian couples but that many of them are still denied to non-married couples.

- How do these recognitions, rights, and benefits help support or protect couples and families?

Case Studies of Same-Sex Families (20 min.)

Invite people to read the four case studies on *Handout 3*.

Discussion questions:

- What rights, privileges, or recognitions are mentioned in the case studies?

Refer to the list that you made previously and put a checkmark beside any that apply. Add others.

- Why do you think recognition may be important to lesbian and gay couples and their families? Which rights and privileges do you think are important? Why?
- How do you feel we are called to respond to this issue, as individuals or as a church? (invite a variety of opinions and responses, encouraging the group to listen to one another rather than debating or judging one another's opinions).

OPTION FOR GROUPS DOING ONLY ONE WORKSHOP

The United Church Position (15 min.)

If this is the only workshop you will be doing, take time to have people read *Handout 8* and *Handout 6* that address the United Church position and faith issues on the civil recognition of same-sex partnerships, marriage and the action response. Use some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What is the United Church position on the issue of civil recognition of gay and lesbian couples?
- How do you feel about the United Church position on this issue?

- What might we do as individuals or as a congregation to support the civil recognition of same-sex marriage?

Closing (15 min.)

Invite the group to take a few moments of silence. Ask each person to recall for themselves some of the things they have heard, wondered about, and learned from this time. Pause for 3-4 minutes.

Ask each person to choose one word that reflects how they are feeling, or what they are thinking about now, after this time of discussion and reflection. Have each person in turn say their word aloud without commentary.

Sing: "God Dismiss Us with Your Blessing" (Voices United #425) or "May the Blessing of God Be Upon You," (Voices United #429).

HANDOUT 2: PERSONAL STORIES

Story #1: Adam Jonathan Con

I came out when I was 21 years old. I always thought of myself as a typical male teenager who dated girls just like the rest of my male friends. But when I entered university, I had a difficult first year because I felt confused by something calling me from within – something that was waiting to emerge. I began to look for books in the library on sexuality. I'm not sure why I was led to this topic. I hid in the basement in the furthest corner away from any other students and read psychology books on sexuality. I really did not understand what my intuition and the Holy Spirit were trying to tell me.

One day in the university newspaper, I saw an advertisement for a six-month self-esteem workshop for gay men. To this day, I have no idea what possessed me to phone and sign up. I hadn't had a sexual experience with another person before. I guess you could say that I was a late bloomer. But I prayed and prayed to God for guidance.

I was the youngest of the 12 men who participated in the workshop. During those six months, I learned a great deal about my sexuality and about gay relationships. And I came to understand the special gift that God was trying to help me discover within myself.

Integrating my spiritual faith and lifestyle with the discovery that I was gay was in many ways frightening. But in other ways, I knew that it would be easy. As a child of God, I knew that God had led me to this point. It was clear to me that it was my task to be honest with my friends and family about my identity as a gay man. I believed then, as I do now, that there is no strength when there is no struggle. Hence, coming out was something I had to do.

First, I came out to my brother and sisters, and then to my parents. My family really didn't have a clear understanding of what my being gay meant. They simply felt that I was choosing a very difficult lifestyle which would be full of disappointments, loneliness, and yet more discrimination. (My family and I were no strangers to discrimination because we are of Asian descent.) They may have been right. However, more important to me was my choice to be honest about who I am with the people that I loved. What more could I ask of myself?

The coming out process started when I was 21. It isn't over. It's not just one event, but a life-long process. As I meet new people and become comfortable with those around me, I constantly find myself in the position of having to tell others about my sexuality. It doesn't get any easier the more I do it. But I'm tired of everyone assuming that I am heterosexual.

I listen to God within me and around me, and I accept where and who I am. I am gay and I am a Christian. My choice to celebrate what God has given me is important. I want to dance the dance of life and sing its song. I am a spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and sexual being. I am of God and I will be whole. Thanks be to God.

Story #2 – Linda M. Ervin

In the spring of 1993, after 20 years as a diaconal minister, I publicly came out as a lesbian. For many people at the Presbytery meeting, it was not news. For others, it was. It was my first public announcement, the first public naming of myself a lesbian.

It was hard to live in the closet. It was small and confining and lonely. It was hard not to be totally truthful with the congregations and missions that employed me. A part of me always had to remain hidden. A part of my life was silenced.

Others came out of the closet before me. I was proud to see this happen, yet I couldn't take that brave step and announce to the church and family who I was. Why was that important? If all of us were accepted unconditionally, life would be so much easier.

When I hear people, including church people, make fun of us, when I hear them declare that we are unfit to be ministers, when I hear them say that we are dangerous, I am hurt. And their anger and their fear of lesbians and gays also frightens me. If they found out who I am, they might try to harm me. And lesbians and gays are often violently harmed. I ask myself, if we are a church which believes in justice, righteousness, and love, why do we speak and act so unlovingly towards lesbians and gays who are also a part of the community of God, a part of the sacred circle of life? When lesbians are excluded from the table, I am hurt and I cry in silence for my own pain and for the pain of all lesbians and gays.

We, the United Church, have publicly said yes to lesbians and gays. But I feel that we have not really engaged in the dialogue needed to understand and welcome lesbians and gays as full participants in all aspects of ministry. Words and actions of exclusion are still heard and experienced by many of us in the church. "We support gays and lesbians, but we can't take a risk" say the congregational search committees.

Some days I wonder, if church people were made aware of the lesbians and gays that they've counted on for ministry over the years, would they still say no to us? I find it ironic that folks still say, "We can't have a gay or lesbian minister...they just wouldn't work out in the congregation." And yet, here I am, the minister, being congratulated for the work I do. If they knew my sexual orientation, I would not be there to receive the words of appreciation for my ministry. What kind of people do they think we are?

Most days I am proud of the United Church. We dare to be a progressive church. Yet I desire us to be even more progressive, inclusive, and courageous. I'll continue to urge us to be more daring. I also worry about the church. There are voices speaking that we still do not hear—voices of racial and ethnic minority women and men, of lesbians and gays, of First Nations peoples, and of youth, to name only a few. What would happen if we let go of what we have known and began to explore the Word in untried ways? What if the privileged white English-speaking heterosexuals kept quiet and listened to the wilderness voices? Silence is so difficult; listening is even more so.

As for me, I write these words with fear. I'm a lesbian feminist diaconal minister who wants to continue to work in the church. I want to be able to celebrate my ministry and my relationship with significant others openly in the place that for years I have called home, the church. I have made it my home even though it has been fraught with violence, job insecurity, exclusion, and pain.

In April, 1992, I made a commitment to the Women in Ministry Committee that I would come out of the closet. Well sisters, I am out. I've kept my pledge and I am proud of myself. It didn't happen the way that I had planned it. Thanks be to God and blessed be.

HANDOUT 3: CASE STUDIES

Marriage is a benchmark by which Canadian society names the everyday development of love and intimacy between a couple. For many people marriage ritualizes the sanctity of love through the very means by which people meet the day-to-day necessities of life, converting houses into homes, the eating of food into customs of community, and sex into love. Restricting the definition of marriage to opposite sex couples questions the capacity of lesbians and gays to develop love and intimacy, undermining human dignity and reinforcing prejudicial attitudes and even violence.

Until very recently, most of the rights, privileges and recognition that heterosexual couples enjoy have been denied to same-sex couples. This impacts same-sex couples and their families at many levels: financially, emotionally, socially, or even physically. The following case studies illustrate some of the potential issues for gay and lesbian couples.

1. Allen and Glen

A few years ago, Allen's partner Glen was suddenly incapacitated by a stroke. To his shock, Allen found that even though they had been together for 23 years, he had no right to make medical decisions on behalf of Glen because those rights belonged by law to the "closest family member." Because the law didn't recognize Allen's and Glen's relationship, the closest family member was defined as Glen's sister, whom Allen had never met. She had long opposed their relationship and had refused to ever enter their house. However, upon the death of her brother, she stepped in and took over the decisions affecting Glen.

Allen was not able to meet with doctors to discuss medical decisions. He was barred from visiting. When his partner died he discovered that he had no right to make funeral or burial arrangements. Glen died without a will, so Allen inherited nothing. Their family home was in his Glen's name, so Allen was evicted and the house sold. Allen received no pension benefits or death benefits.

2. Marti

Marti had been in a same-sex relationship for 15 years when her partner left her. The two had jointly raised two adopted children, but the children were adopted by Marti's partner because the law prohibited same-sex couples from adopting jointly. When the couple separated, Marti had no right to spousal support, even though she was the one who had chosen to stay home to care for the children. She had no right to apply for custody, and was cut off from any access to the children with no legal recourse. And she was not accorded the protection married couples receive for property division.

3. Chris and Deni

A young couple, Chris and Deni, are just beginning a relationship. As they seek to foster this lifetime commitment, they realize they need the support and encouragement from their faith community. They want to have a public service of commitment and blessing, but are turned down by their church. In any case, it turns out that they would be best to keep their relationship very private because of taunting and threats from one of their neighbours. They feel increasingly isolated.

They are also finding things tough going financially. Only Chris is working; Deni is still in university. A tax break to allow Chris to declare Deni as a dependent would help ease the pressure, but that right is only accorded to heterosexual couples. Even being able to claim Deni on Chris's company benefits plan would help with things like medical expenses. But that right, too, is reserved for married or common law couples of the opposite sex.

4. Robbie

Robbie may be only nine years old, but he has a way of crystallizing an issue that a score of lawyers took five days to elaborate for a panel of judges. "I think this case means no one will be able to say I don't have a real family," Robbie told reporters on the steps of Osgoode Hall, when the Ontario Superior Court began hearing a constitutional challenge made by his parents Alison and Joyce. Alison and Joyce had gone to court because they had been refused the right to marry. Why? Because they were the same sex.

Alison and Joyce have been together since 1984. They have had two children within the relationship, Hannah Ruth who was born to Joyce in 1986 and Robbie, who was born to Alison in 1992. Both children have been jointly raised since birth by the couple and were jointly adopted by each parent in 1995. Astonishingly while a legal relationship has been established between the parents and the children, Alison and Joyce can't get married.

By denying gays and lesbians the right to marry Alison believes that society sends a message that homosexuals and their families aren't real. This fosters discrimination and even violence. As Joyce states, "I am engaged in this struggle to achieve the freedom to marry as part of our continuing effort to keep our kids safe—not just our kids, but all kids."

WORKSHOP 2: FAITH REFLECTION

Purpose

To help participants to reflect on some of the theological and biblical issues surrounding same-sex relationships.

Preparation

- Bring Bibles, writing paper and pens, newsprint, flip-chart stand, markers, three candles and matches, and copies of Voices United.
- Make copies of *Handout 6: Faith Reflections on Same-Sex Marriage* and *Handout 7: A Litany of Covenant*.
- If this is the only workshop you are doing, make copies of *Handout 8: The United Church Position* and *Handout 9: Civil Recognition and Why It is Important to Same-Sex Couples*.
- You may also need copies of *Handout 4: Biblical Background* and *Handout 5: Biblical References to Homosexuality*. Make copies of the group discussion questions for the small groups.

WORKSHOP PLAN:

Introduction (5-10 min.)

Welcome the group and make sure members know one another. Allow a time for introductions if necessary. Review the plan for the workshop and give any logistical information that may be required.

Say the United Church Creed together. (It is printed on *Handout 6*.)

Reflecting on Scripture

Four options are provided below. Choose two of them for your session. If your group is very new to the topic of biblical understandings of sexual orientation, or has heard strong biblical condemnation of homosexuality, it may be important to include Option 4 as one of your choices.

OPTION 1: Jeremiah 31:31-34 (20 min.)

Introduce the reading from Jeremiah with the information on Jeremiah 31:31-34 (see *Handout 4: Biblical Background*). You might do this verbally or provide a handout.

Ask someone to read aloud Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Hand out Bibles and group discussion questions. Ask people to move into groups of 4-5 people to discuss the following questions:

- How are the prophetic writings or the Mosaic Law used today to pronounce judgement against people—for example, the verses from Leviticus that invoke the death penalty for adultery, male homosexual acts, or sorcery (Lev. 20:10,13 and 27)?
- How has that had an impact upon you or upon your family, friends, or community?
- What are some of the laws that you think God has written on our hearts?
- What are some of the human laws or judgements that sometimes get confused with “God’s law”?

How can we discern the difference?

Gather back together in the whole group. Ask someone to reread the Jeremiah passage.

- What understanding of God’s grace and compassion is offered in this passage?

OPTION 2: Reflecting on Acts 10:1-34 (30 min.)

Introduce the passage from Acts with the information on Acts 10:1-34 (see *Handout 4: Biblical Background*). You might do this verbally or provide a handout..

Ask someone to read aloud Acts 10:1-34.

Hand out copies of the following questions and ask people to discuss them in pairs.

- How does the issue of civil recognition of gay and lesbian marriage upset or unsettle our churches? Does the issue upset or unsettle you? If so, how?
- In what ways is this similar to or different from Peter’s unsettling experience with the vision and with Cornelius?
- What new understanding of God did Peter discover?
- How does this story, and Peter’s understanding of God’s way, relate to the issue of the civil recognition of gay and lesbian partnerships, including marriage?

OPTION 3: Reflecting on the Story of a Woman Anointing Jesus (20 min.)

Introduce the story of the woman with ointment who anointed Jesus by noting that there are three accounts of this event in the Bible, found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Because Matthew’s and Luke’s version are almost identical, only Luke and Mark will be read. Ask someone to read aloud Luke 7:36-50 and someone else to read aloud Mark 14:3-9.

Discussion in pairs:

- Who do you most identify with in the story? Why?

Give the group the background information on the story of a woman anointing Jesus (see *Handout 4: Biblical Background*). You might do this verbally or provide a handout.

Invite the group to discuss the following questions.

- How do you think Jesus might have responded to social and sexual “outcasts” in our society today?
- What boundaries or changes in attitude are you called to make as you deal with the issue of civil recognition of same-sex couples?
- What hope do you find in this story?

OPTION 4: Biblical References to Homosexuality (20 min.)

Invite the group to think about what they know the Bible says about homosexuality. The following questions may help prompt them:

- Did Jesus or the gospel writers mention homosexuality or same-sex relationships?
- In what part of the Bible is the death penalty invoked for same-sex genital relations?
- How does the Apostle Paul view same-sex sexual activity?

Have someone read aloud Leviticus 20:13.

- How do you feel as you hear this text?
- How has this verse been used to hurt gay and lesbian people and their families?
- What would you say to someone who believes this text literally (that men who engage in homosexual acts should receive the death penalty)?

Divide into small groups. Give each group a copy of *Handout 5: Biblical References to Homosexuality* and ask them read it together, looking up the passages that are referred to. As they work, they might share reactions to the information they discover.

Gather back in the whole group:

- What did you discover about what the Bible says about homosexuality from this exercise?
- How do you respond to people who believe that homosexuality is against God’s will, as stated in the Bible?

Individual Reflection (15 min.)

Hand out paper and pens and copies of *Handout 6: Faith Reflections on Same-Sex Marriage*. Invite people to read the article and then to consider some of the reflection questions that it poses. Ask them to focus on questions that stand out for them as important ones for them to consider today, rather than trying to answer all the questions.

OPTION FOR GROUPS DOING ONLY ONE WORKSHOP ON THIS TOPIC

Action Response: (15 min.)

If this is the only workshop you will be doing, take time to have people read *Handout 8: The United Church Position* and *Handout 9: Civil Recognition and Why It is Important to Same-Sex Couples*. Encourage participants to listen to one another rather than judging or debating the responses.

- How or why is this issue important to you personally?
- What do you think is important to do in response to this issue?
- What might we do as individuals or as a congregation to affirm same-sex marriage?

Closing (15 min.)

Ask people to take a moment to write on a piece of paper a one-sentence affirmation or statement of faith based on the workshop reflections and discussion. Have each person who wishes to do so to share their statement aloud.

A Litany of Covenant

Ask three people in the group to light candles at the appropriate points in the meditation. Ask three people to be readers. Hand out copies of the opening meditation, *Handout 7: A Litany of Covenant* and invite group members to join in the response at the appropriate points.

Sing: "O for a World" (Voices United #697).

HANDOUT 4:

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Early in his prophetic career, Jeremiah preached a message of harsh judgement. He warned that if the nation of Judah did not obey the covenant with God, through strict adherence to the law of Moses, the nation would be doomed. With the great Assyrian Empire crumbling, and Babylon looming large on the horizon, Jeremiah saw the nation's only hope was to obey God's commandments.

This complex body of law, which is outlined in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, includes many instructions on justice and care for the poor, outcasts, and strangers. It also includes the so-called "holiness code"—detailed instructions and prohibitions concerning things that make one ritually "unclean," such as wearing certain kinds of clothing; eating certain foods; having contact with blood, skin diseases, or other bodily fluids; and certain kinds of sexual contact. This is the part of the Hebrew scriptures that contains a verse condemning to death men who "lie with another man as with a woman."

The doom that Jeremiah predicted came to pass. Judah fell to the Babylonians and many of its leaders were taken into exile. Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem, and continued to preach, but his message changed. He didn't tell people this was all their fault; he didn't remind them that the destruction was God's punishment for their sins. Rather, he spoke of a new covenant, a covenant not written on stone or parchment by human hands, but written by God within the heart of each human being.

Acts 10:1-34

Peter had obeyed the law since childhood—the law of the Mosaic covenant, which, among other things, forbade the eating of certain foods and forbade contact with foreigners, and required all Jewish males to be circumcised. As the early Christian church moved out from its origins within Judaism into the Gentile world, a tension emerged. Just how inclusive was this new community to be? Who were the insiders? Were those outside Judaism also outside the church?

The story of Peter's vision, as it is told in Acts, suggests that the community ultimately decided to embrace a wider understanding of inclusion.

Cornelius, a Roman centurion, is described as being faithful, prayerful, and generous to the poor. In a vision, he is led to Peter. Peter, a Jew, is invited to step beyond the bounds of what he has always understood to be right and faithful (don't eat certain foods, have no contact with foreigners or the uncircumcised) in order to welcome Cornelius.

Cornelius invites Peter to teach him all he knows, but ultimately it is Peter who also learns from the foreigner as Peter comes to a new understanding of God.

A Woman Anointing Jesus (Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50)

The different versions of this story of a woman anointing Jesus emphasize different aspects of the event. Luke focuses on the woman's sin, which is often assumed to be a sexual sin (although nothing in the story says this). Mark's and Matthew's version emphasize a different detail. They note that the event takes place in the house of Simon, a leper.

Richard Cleaver, in *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1995) speculates that if the host was indeed a leper he would be required to omit the usual courtesies (an embrace, a kiss, foot washing) and not touch his guest. Perhaps, instead of condemning his host for being unwelcoming Jesus was gently inviting Simon to respect himself regardless of how the community viewed him. Perhaps Jesus was inviting the leper to overcome social taboos and touch Jesus, as the woman had done. Perhaps Jesus was inviting the social outcast to change his attitude about himself.

Gay and lesbian people have heard in this story an invitation to move beyond their own internalized homophobia and self-hatred.

In all the versions of this story, Jesus crossed boundaries and broke social taboos—a woman's sin, a woman's touch, a leper's uncleanness—to bring healing and wholeness. In his ministry, Jesus continually confronted the rules and prescriptions that kept some people as outcasts and drew them into community. He did not condemn; he offered acceptance and welcome.

HANDOUT 5: BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO HOMOSEXUALITY

Even though there is no record of Jesus having mentioned homosexuality or same-sex relationships, many Christians continue to believe that Jesus himself condemned homosexuality. Jesus did not. Instead he preached a message of radical inclusion, in stark contrast to the strict adherence to purity codes observed by many within his society.

So what does the Bible say about homosexuality? The short answer is, “nothing.” The concept of homosexuality as a sexual orientation was unknown in biblical times. The Bible does make a few explicit references to same-sex genital activity. Several of these texts have been used to assert a biblical condemnation of homosexuals and their relationships.

Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19, cf. Judges 19-21)

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah and a very similar story in Judges, has nothing to do with same-sex affection or sexual intimacy. Rather, it is about infringing ancient Near Eastern hospitality codes, and about gang rape as a violent expression of male dominance. In both stories, women are offered to men “to do with as they please.” The women are offered as substitutes for male visitors that townsmen want to violate. In the story from Judges, the two women are gang-raped and murdered.

When later biblical texts refer to “the sin of Sodom,” the sins referred to are arrogance, adultery, lies, insincere religious practices, political corruption, oppression of the poor, neglect of orphans and widows, and inhospitality. Homosexuality or same-sex sexual acts are not mentioned.

An Abomination (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13)

Leviticus states, “if a man lies with a man as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.” The second reference adds, “they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.”

These acts were considered an abomination (which literally means a practice which prohibits one from entering the precinct of the Jewish temple) for several reasons.

Within the patriarchal culture a man treated another man “like a woman” he degraded him, because women were considered non-persons. This was reflected in an ancient Near Eastern practice of anal raping of captured male foes as a sign of domination. In patriarchal societies, the worst and most degrading thing a man could do to another man is to use him as a woman might be used.

Secondly, the Hebrew understanding of procreation was that the sperm contained all of life. It entered the female body for incubation only. Thus, the spilling of sperm in coitus interruptus (Genesis 38:1-11), masturbation, or anal intercourse was like abortion or murder.

People who single out these verses to condemn lesbians and gays choose to ignore other prohibitions in the book of Leviticus such as being naked with next of kin (which was a crime); having sex during menstruation; breeding hybrid plants; wearing garments made of more than one type of fibre; eating rabbit, meat with blood or milk, shellfish, or shrimp; bearing tattoos; or males cutting the hair on their temples and trimming their beards.

Male Prostitutes (1 Corinthians 6:9)

Paul's list of "wrongdoers"—those who "will not inherit the kingdom of God"—includes male prostitutes. The Greek word, which is translated "Sodomites" or "homosexuals" in some versions of the Bible, refers to adolescent boys who sold sexual favours to older men in Greek towns such as Corinth.

Unnatural Relations (Romans 1:26-27)

In reference to women, Paul writes of women who exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural. The specific acts, which are against nature, are not specified. In the modern period this is often assumed to mean homosexuality. Pre-twentieth century Christians would have interpreted this to mean non-procreative sexual activity, or oral and anal sex.

The passage goes on to condemn men who, "giving up natural intercourse with women were consumed with passion for one another." In Paul's time there was no notion of homosexual orientation so Paul would have assumed that homosexual relations were unnatural for everyone. Gay and lesbian people have noted that a same-sex relationship would be unnatural for (against the nature of) a heterosexual person. But it would be very much according to the nature of a gay or lesbian person.

Paul uses these statements in a debate about the ritual requirements of Jewish law regarding diet and male circumcision. Ironically, these verses, which are so often quoted, to judge and condemn homosexuals were used by rhetorically by Paul to denounce judgemental and self-righteous behaviour. Paul chose behaviour that would have been generally condemned in order to make his point. But his point was, "There is no one who is righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:9).

For further reading:

Gay Theology Without Apology. By Gary David Comstock (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994). David Comstock is an ordained minister of The United Church of Christ and serves as a college chaplain.

The New Testament and Homosexuality. By Robin Scroggs (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987). Robin Scroggs is the former Professor of New Testament, Union Theological Seminary, New York.

Also see the Resources section, starting on page 71.

HANDOUT 6: FAITH REFLECTIONS ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

The United Church of Canada, A New Creed

We are not alone,
 we live in God's world.
We believe in God:
 who has created and is creating,
 who has come in Jesus,
 the Word made flesh,
 to reconcile and make new,
 who works in us and others
 by the Spirit.
We trust in God.
We are called to be the Church:
 to celebrate God's presence,
 to live with respect in Creation,
 to love and serve others,
 to seek justice and resist evil,
 to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
 our judge and our hope.
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
 God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God.

We are not alone, we live in God's world...We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

This affirmation reminds us that we do not live in isolation on this planet. God created us for relationship and God calls us into relationship. We are not alone; we are not created to be alone. As human beings we need relationship as surely as we need air, water, or food. An infant who is deprived of human touch will wither and die. Adults who are deprived of loving relationships also wither and die, spiritually, emotionally, and even physically.

Relationships bring joy, meaning and hope into our lives. We celebrate and give thanks for God's gift of loving relationship.

There are many different kinds of human relationships—friends, parents and children, family, and marriage or other intimate partnerships. The United Church has consistently affirmed the vast variety of human relationships that are possible. In its 1988 statement, ("Membership, Ministry, and Human Sexuality," 32nd General Council, 1988) the United Church recognized "the commitment that is present in many relationships other than Christian marriage; and that the church is called to minister to people in these relationships as in others." In 2000, when the church renounced its 1960 statement that homosexuality is sin, it affirmed that "human sexual

orientations (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Heterosexual) are a gift from God, part of the marvellous diversity of creation.” (Resolution C-13 Human Sexuality, 37th General Council, 2000).

The General Council went even further. It agreed to “affirm lesbian and gay partnerships, actively work for their civil recognition, and recognize them in church documentation and services of blessing.” (Resolution C-14 Human Sexuality, 37th General Council, 2000).

The church has not held an “anything goes” ethic, however. In 1988 the church also stated that is called to emphasize and work for values within marriage and family relationships that “contribute to the wholeness of persons” and that it is called to challenge those values that “limit and degrade personal worth.” (“Membership, Ministry, and Human Sexuality,” 32nd General Council, 1988)

The Membership, Ministry, and Human Sexuality statement included this affirmation. “We agree that God’s intention for human relationships is that they be faithful, responsible, just, loving, health-giving, healing, and sustaining of community and self.” (“Membership, Ministry, and Human Sexuality,” 32nd General Council, 1988)

As you reflect on these statements, consider:

- How has traditional church teaching condemning homosexuality denied homosexual people the possibility of life-giving and life-affirming intimate relationships?
- How does civil recognition help people in same-sex partnerships to live out God’s intention for human relationships?

We believe in God, who has created and is creating...

We believe that God, who created, continues to create and renew the earth. We believe in a God who is continually creating “a new thing.” The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed God’s new covenant, written on the heart. The young woman, Mary, rejoices in the new creation that God is bringing to birth within her and in the world. Jesus announced the reign of God with radical new images—an unclean woman healed, an outcast embraced, a banquet to which all are invited. And, Peter’s vision opened up a radical re-understanding of God’s inclusive love.

God, who is continually creating, invites us to experience the new creation that is unfolding all around us. God continues to enter into and transform human experience with love, justice, and healing. God calls us to new realities. God invites us to step out of our previous notions of what God’s love is all about and embrace God’s new creation.

The United Church has recognized that we do not have a full and complete understanding of God and of God’s intentions, and that we must continue to grow and learn, both as individuals and as a faith community. In 1988, the General Council urged the church to “respond to the call for further study and dialogue.” (“Membership, Ministry, and Human Sexuality,” 32nd General Council, 1988). And in 2000, the General Council encouraged congregations to “enter into the Affirming congregation study process.” (Resolution C-15 Human Sexuality, 37th General Council).

As you reflect on these statements, consider:

- What new thing is God calling you to see or understand?
- How might the civil recognition of same-sex marriage be part of God’s ongoing creative activity to bring love, justice, and healing?

**We believe in God ...
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new...**

Jesus continually entered into community with those his society had excluded and condemned—social outcasts, those who were ritually unclean, the sick, foreigners, those judged by others to be sinners. He did not condemn but healed, affirmed, befriended, and loved. He challenged unjust systems and structures and invited everyone to experience God’s gracious love. And we are called to do the same.

The human rights affirmations of successive General Council’s have called for equal treatment and non-discrimination toward people of minority sexual orientations. It has called on governments to accord gay, lesbian, and bisexual people the same rights as all Canadians. The church has also looked inwards, changing its own policies and procedures, and working to heal past hurts. In 2000, the General Council urged all church bodies and members “to learn ways to offer healing for the damage inadvertently caused by the historic stance of our church on homosexuality” (Resolution C-12, Human Sexuality, 37th General Council, 2000).

**Who has come in Jesus... to reconcile and make new...
who works in us and others by the Spirit**

Our faith does not set us apart from the world in which we live. Rather, we are called to be part of a faith community, which lives out a vision of love and justice in response to hatred and evil. We are called to reconcile—to come back into community with one another. As agents of reconciliation, we invite others into community, and we open ourselves to relationship with others.

As you reflect on these statements, consider:

- What newness and reconciliation might be possible if same-sex relationships are valued and affirmed?
- How might our church be called to reconcile and make new, as we respond to the issue of civil-recognition of same-sex marriage?
- How might God work in you or in others by the Spirit, in response to this issue?

HANDOUT 7:

A LITANY OF COVENANT

Reader 1: The days are surely coming, says God, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they will be my people. (Jeremiah 31:31, 33b)
(first candle is lit)

Response: Write your covenant within our hearts O God, that we may be your people and you may be our God.

Reader 2: Now while Jesus was at Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Jesus with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on Jesus' head as he sat at the table. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet he would know what kind of woman this is who is touching him." Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you..." (Matthew 26:6, Luke 7:39-40a)
(second candle is lit)

Response: Speak your word to us, O God. Change our minds and our hearts, that we may be your people and you may be our God.

Reader 3: Peter saw the heaven opened and something like a sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Peter was told to eat the creatures, even though he had been taught from childhood that this was against God's law. Peter wondered what the vision could mean. Later, Peter began to speak to them. "I truly understand that God does not have favourites but treats all people alike," he said. (Acts 10:1-34)
(the third candle is lit)

Response: Help us to relate to all people as you do, O God, with fairness and with love. Help us to include as you include, to welcome as you welcome. And we will be your people and you will be our God.

Amen.

WORKSHOP 3: CIVIL RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Purpose

- To help participants learn what the civil recognition of same-sex marriage means and why it is important as a justice and human rights issue.
- To clarify the position of the United Church and existing federal and provincial/territorial legislation regarding recognition and rights for same-sex couples.

Preparation

- Bring writing paper and pens, newsprint, flip-chart stand, markers, and copies of Voices United.
- Make copies of *Handout 8: The United Church Position on Marriage*, *Handout 9: Civil Recognition and Why It is Important to Same-Sex Couples*, *Handout 10: Rights of Same-Sex Couples in Canada*, and *Handout 11: Case Studies*.
- If you have not done previous workshops, make copies of Handout 6: Faith Reflections.
- Before the workshop, ask someone who has access to the Internet to check The United Church of Canada Web site (www.united-church.ca) or the EGALE Web site (www.egale.ca) and bring to the group the latest information on the civil recognition of same-sex relationships both nationally and in your province or territory. Ask them to also note any action ideas or responses that are being called for at this time (e.g. letter-writing campaigns or petitions).
- Make copies of the discussion questions for small groups.

WORKSHOP PLAN:

Introduction (5-10 min.)

Welcome the group and make sure group members know one another. Allow a time for introductions if necessary. Review the plan for the workshop and give any logistical information that may be required.

Prayer: God of love, we ask you to bless us as we gather here today [this evening]. We think with gratitude of those we love—those who bring our lives joy and meaning and hope. Help us to be mindful of all those who seek to nurture loving relationships in a world so torn by conflict and brokenness. Bless our relationships, O God. And bless what we do here as we talk and listen and reflect. Help us to nurture caring and respectful relationships with one another. Amen.

Sing: “God is Passionate Life” (*Voices United* #695).

OPTION FOR GROUPS DOING ONLY ONE WORKSHOP ON THIS TOPIC.

Faith Reflections on Same-Sex Relationships (15-25 min.)

If you have not done Workshops 1 and 2, give participants time to read *Handout 6: Faith Reflections on Same-Sex Marriage*. Invite people to take a few minutes of silent reflection to consider how this issue has touched their own life personally and what is their own faith response.

Discuss the following question in pairs or small groups:

- How has this issue touched your own life?

In the large group invite people to discuss the following:

- What do you affirm from the article you just read?
- What concerns or questions did this article raise for you?

Clarifying the Position of The United Church of Canada (15 min.)

Ask participants to read *Handout 8: The United Church Position on Marriage*, which addresses The United Church of Canada's position on civil recognition of same-sex relationships, including marriage. Discuss the following questions:

- How is the United Church position on these issues different from or similar to your own personal position?
- How is it different from or similar to the opinions of others in your congregation?

Discuss the Issues (15 min.)

Invite people to read *Handout 9: Civil Recognition and Why It is Important to Same-Sex Couples*. How does the recognition of a relationship help to support and nurture a relationship? Encourage the group to think of the kinds of support and recognition that exist for married couples.

- Why do you think public recognition and support of a relationship might be important for same-sex couples and their family and friends? Which kinds of recognition and support do you think are most important?

Record key ideas on newsprint.

Rights of Same-Sex Couples in Canada (15 min.)

Give out *Handout 10* on the status of civil recognition for same-sex couples federally. Review the information that has been gathered from the Internet. If necessary, update the handout.

Discuss:

- What changes are needed in order for gay and lesbian couples to have the same rights and recognition as heterosexual ones?

Record key ideas on newsprint.

Case Studies (30 min.)

Ask participants to divide into three or four working groups. Each group will look at a particular case study on *Handout 11* and address the questions on the handout. Ask each group to have someone take notes of their discussion.

Have each group report back on some of the areas where they think important changes are needed in our church, our community, our province, or nationally, in order for same-sex families to have the support and recognition they need.

Closing (5 min.)

Sing: "To Show by Touch and Word," (Voices United #427).

Prayer: O God, we go out to be your people in the world. Help us show, by our touching and by our words, that you are a God of love and compassion. Help us to share your love, by touch and by word. Help us to live your way, by touch and by word. Amen.

HANDOUT 8: THE UNITED CHURCH POSITION ON MARRIAGE

The United Church Position on Same-Sex Relationships

Successive General Councils since the mid-1970s have called for the equal treatment of lesbians and gays and for non-discrimination in employment, services, and accommodation. The church also has called for the equal treatment of lesbians and gays in the Income Tax Act.

The church has acted on these policies and commitments in a variety of ways. For example, all church employees receive equal benefits regardless of sexual orientation, and the church's health, dental, and pension benefits are inclusive of lesbians and gays and their partners and families. The church produces resources and educational materials on human sexual orientations, gender identities, and same-sex partnership and marriage. And it speaks out on these issues to governments, courts and other public bodies.

The United Church Position on Same-Sex Marriage

The 38th General Council in 2003 called on the Government of Canada to recognize same-sex marriage in federal law. This affirmation of same-sex marriage builds on the resolution passed in 2000, when the 37th General Council of the church officially affirmed its support for same-sex partnerships. Because the General Council is the highest decision-making body of the United Church, decisions taken by the people elected to General Council become the policy of the church on social issues with which it is involved.

Since 1990, the United Church has officially recognized the role of congregations and ministers in supporting and celebrating same-sex unions. By that time, there were already some congregations and ministry personnel offering services of covenant and blessing. In 1992, the General Council requested liturgical and pastoral resources to help same-sex couples make their relationships permanent through "same-sex covenants."

The General Council in 2000 encouraged local pastoral charges to study and consider becoming Affirming congregations. Affirming congregations are ones that welcome and support gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people in all aspects of church life. These congregations offer services of covenant, now referred by some congregations as marriages, for same-sex couples. They also work in the community to support full human rights and civil recognition for such relationships.

The church also committed itself to actively work for the civil recognition of same-sex unions, including marriage, recognizing them in church documentation (i.e. marriage registers) and in services of blessing.

The United Church Position on Marriage, Separation, and Divorce

The United Church does not consider marriage a sacrament. However, it does place an extremely high value on the seriousness of vows taken before God and in the presence of witnesses. The church's position is to support life-long relationships of care, justice, mutuality, and faithfulness. These same standards apply to both homosexual and heterosexual couples.

However, the church does not condemn people who decide divorce is the only path open to them. It offers counselling and enrichment programs. But in the end, if a couple cannot continue together they will still receive the grace of God and the communion of the church.

Process for Deciding if a Congregation Will Offer Same-Sex Covenants or Marriages

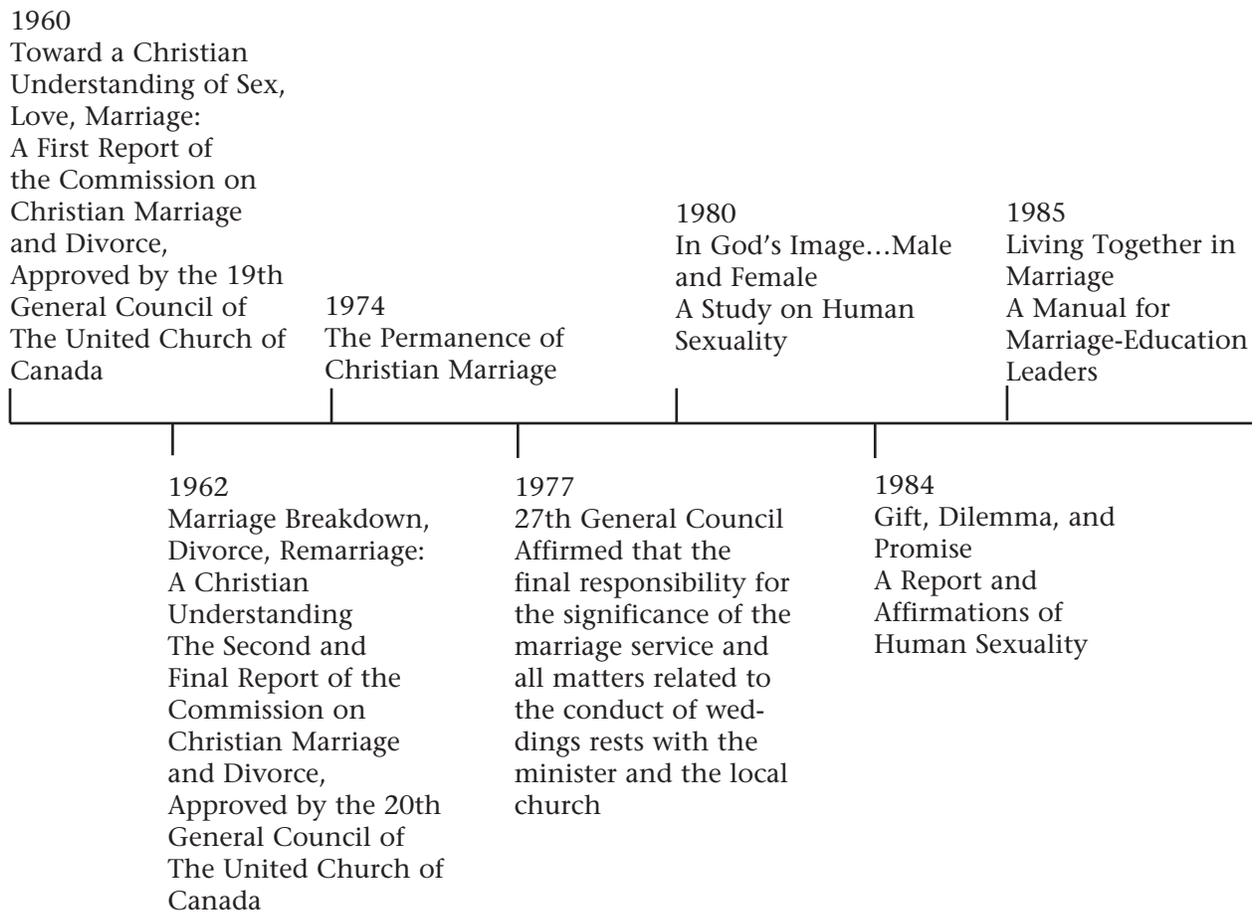
As with heterosexual marriages, the council or session of each congregation makes decisions about congregational policy on same-sex marriages.

Most of the supportive congregational policies parallel what the congregation offers to heterosexual couples wanting to get married. However, a few congregations limit same-sex marriage to congregational members. Other congregations, however, limit heterosexual weddings to congregational members and offer same-sex marriage to all who request this because they are the only congregations in their region to provide this service.

**CHRONOLOGY OF MARRIAGE AND
EQUALITY RIGHTS IN THE UNITED
CHURCH OF CANADA**

CHRONOLOGY OF MARRIAGE AND EQUALITY

The Basis of Union (1925): (*The Manual*) Article XX of Christian Service and the Final



RIGHTS IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

Triumph. "...to preserve the inviolability of marriage and the sanctity of the family..."

<p>1992 34th General Council Liturgical and pastoral resources for same-sex covenants to be made available to congregations</p>	<p>1997 36th General Council Resolution requested that United Church regional Conferences urge all teachers' unions and associations to provide in-service education on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues</p>	<p>2000 37th General Council Adopted policy to affirm and work toward the civil recognition of same-sex partnerships</p>	<p>2003 Of Love and Justice: Toward the Civil Recognition of Same-Sex Partnerships A congregational guide for study and action</p> <p>2003 Passion and Freedom A Resource for Ministers and Leaders Supporting the Lives of Couples</p>
<p>1988 Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality A New Statement of The United Church of Canada by the 32nd General Council</p>	<p>1995 Together in Faith Inclusive Resources about Sexual Diversity for Study, Dialogue, Celebration, and Action</p>	<p>1999 Bill C-23, Modernization of Benefits and Obligations the United Church appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in support of this bill</p>	<p>2003 38th General Council Resolved to call on the Government of Canada to recognize same-sex marriage in the marriage legislation</p>

CHRONOLOGY OF MARRIAGE AND EQUALITY RIGHTS IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

The Basis of Union (1925): (*The Manual*) Article XX. Of Christian Service and the Final Triumph. "...to preserve the inviolability of marriage and the sanctity of the family..."

1960 Toward a Christian Understanding of Sex, Love, Marriage: A First Report of the Commission on Christian Marriage and Divorce, Approved by the 19th General Council of The United Church of Canada

Marriage

This report provided a statement on a Christian understanding of marriage and sex, stating: "Marriage is an intimate personal union to which a man and woman consent, consummated in sexual intercourse, and perfected in a life-long partnership of mutual love. Marriage is also a social institution recognized and regulated by the laws and customs which a society develops in order to safeguard its own continuity and welfare. A Christian marriage is one in which husband and wife have publicly covenanted together with God..." (p. 1).

This commission recommended that the church provide preparation for marriage and family responsibility by providing study courses on Christian marriage and sex education, pastoral training of ministers, and education for Christian family life and responsible parenthood. In addition, it made recommendations regarding sterility and artificial insemination, and single people and their needs (pp. 61–65).

1962 Marriage Breakdown, Divorce, Remarriage: A Christian Understanding The Second and Final Report of the Commission on Christian Marriage and Divorce, Approved by the 20th General Council of The United Church of Canada

Marriage

This report reaffirmed the need for marriage preparation; addressed the issue of age of consent to marry; encouraged counsel for partners with marital problems; acknowledged that some marriages do fail and United Church ministers do solemnize marriages of divorced people; urged the government to appoint a royal commission on divorce; and urged the government to establish within the Department of National Health and Welfare a division of Marriage and Family Welfare. It recommended that the church provide pastoral care for divorced people and that ministers may officiate at marriages of divorced people (though no minister in the United Church is required to officiate at the remarriage of a divorced person against his or her own conscience). It also reaffirmed the church's commitment to strengthening our church's provision for marriage preparation, marriage guidance, and Christian family life education (pp. 110–18).

1974 The Permanence of Christian Marriage

Marriage

This resource was produced by The Committee on Theology and Faith in 1975. “The 26th General Council meeting in 1974 at Guelph affirmed the necessity for Christian marriage to be life-long in its intention and directed that in any service for Christian marriage a vow expressing life-long intention be included.”

1977 27th General Council

Marriage

The United Church of Canada affirmed that the final responsibility for the significance of the marriage service and all matters related to the conduct of weddings rests with the minister and the local church.

The United Church of Canada recommended that United Church ministers and congregations encourage ecumenical cooperation wherever possible with regard to the preparation, conduct, and support of marriages.

In 1978 the Division of Mission in Canada approved the study statement entitled *Marriage Today* and established the task force that created *In God's Image*.

1980 In God's Image...Male and Female: A Study on Human Sexuality

Marriage

This study on human sexuality attempted to

- provide ways to understand one's own sexual experience
- reflect on it in the light of the gospel and of modern knowledge, and examine our own beliefs

It identified the following issues needing further study in the church: education in human sexuality, support in our sexual journey, working for social change, society and homosexuality, sexual orientation and civil rights, ordination, commissioning and declared homosexual people. Referred to the 30th General Council.

1984 Gift, Dilemma, and Promise: A Report and Affirmations of Human Sexuality

Marriage

This report was received by the 30th General Council. The report contained affirmations on sexuality and selfhood; marriage; intimacy; sexism, society, self; and sexual orientation. The United Church of Canada affirmed

- that marriage is a gift of God through which Christians make a covenant with each other and with God
- that in marriage we offer each other the promise of lifelong companionship, the rich expression of human affections and sexuality, and nurture for the children
- that marriage as an institution can undergird each relationship and provide stability for society
- the value of marriage and that the church must work both to redeem and care for the institution and to support those entering into a covenant relationship with each other.

The United Church of Canada acknowledged that marriage can also be destructive, and that marriage as an institution is shaped by cultural attitudes that are patriarchal and oppressive.

Equality Rights

In 1984, The United Church of Canada affirmed our acceptance of all human beings as persons made in the image of God, regardless of their sexual orientation.

1985 Living Together in Marriage: A Manual for Marriage-Education Leaders

This resource affirmed that marriage is one of God's gifts, part of God's intention for many human lives.

1988 Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality: A New Statement of The United Church of Canada by the 32nd General Council

Marriage

The council reaffirmed the affirmations found in *Gift, Dilemma, and Promise*.

The council declared that all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, who profess faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to him, are welcome to be or become full members of the church.

The 32nd General Council affirmed that God's intention for all human relationships is that they be faithful, responsible, just, loving, health-giving, healing, and sustaining of community and self. The implication is that these standards apply to both heterosexual and homosexual couples.

In 1988, the church affirmed that all persons who profess faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of their sexual orientation, are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry.

1992 34th General Council

Equality Rights

In 1992, the General Council directed that liturgical and pastoral resources for same-sex covenants be made available to congregations. This resulted in the resource *Together in Faith: Inclusive Resources about Sexual Diversity for Study, Dialogue, Celebration, and Action* (published 1995).

1997 36th General Council

Equality Rights

In 1997, the 36th General Council passed a resolution requesting that United Church regional Conferences urge all teachers' unions and associations to provide in-service education on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues in order to promote tolerance. To this end, in 2003 the United Church published *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth Issues in Canada: Action Resources for United Church Congregations*.

1999

Equality Rights

In 1999, the United Church appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in support of Bill C-23, *Modernization of Benefits and Obligations*, as a tangible expression of the United Church's commitment to the equality of heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

2000 37th General Council

Marriage

In 2000 the 37th General Council of the United Church adopted the policy to affirm and work toward the civil recognition of same-sex partnerships. As a result, some United Church congregations began to record the services of same-sex couples in their marriage registers and to forward these registrations to provincial governments for licensing.

Celebrate God's Presence was produced, offering resources to celebrate marriage and life-long partnerships (mandated by the 36th General Council).

Equality Rights

In 2000, the 37th General Council affirmed that human sexual orientations, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are a gift from God and part of the marvellous diversity of creation.

2003 38th General Council

Marriage

Of Love and Justice: Toward the Civil Recognition of Same-Sex Marriage, a congregational guide for study and action, is a response to the resolutions passed at the 37th General Council, which called on the church to affirm lesbian and gay partnerships and to work for their civil recognition, and to recognize them in church documentation and services of blessing.

In February 2003, in a submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in response to the Department of Justice Discussion Paper *Marriage and Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Unions*, The United Church of Canada suggested that the federal government adopt a legislative framework that provides the same civil recognition for heterosexual and homosexual couples.

In the fall of 2003, *Passion and Freedom: A Resource for Ministers and Leaders Supporting the Lives of Couples* is produced. *Passion and Freedom* is a resource to support couples through the beginnings, middles, and endings of relationships. An accompanying couples' resource of the same name will be produced in the spring of 2004.

At the 38th General Council, The United Church of Canada resolved to call on the Government of Canada to recognize same-sex marriage in the marriage legislation.

Equality Rights

With the most recent decision by the Ontario and British Columbia Courts of Appeal, some United Churches in Ontario and B.C. are legally performing and recording weddings of same-sex couples.

HANDOUT 9: CIVIL RECOGNITION AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO SAME-SEX COUPLES

Of Love and Justice

The civil recognition of same-sex partnerships is about love. It is about love between life partners who seek to live in relationships based on trust, mutuality, and commitment. And it is also about the love of caring communities—families, friends, churches—that acknowledge, support, nurture, challenge, and honour such relationships.

Civil recognition is also about justice. It is about according same-sex couples the same rights, responsibilities, privileges, and protections as any other couples in our society. It is about ensuring that all people are treated with fairness, dignity, and respect, and that no one is disenfranchised because of their choice of life-partner.

What is Civil Recognition?

The term “civil recognition” encompasses: public acknowledgement, celebration, blessing, and recognition of the relationship; basic human rights; legal, civil, and financial rights and privileges; and protection from discrimination and harassment.

Marriage is probably the best-known form of civil recognition of a relationship. Married couples have a public and visibly recognized relationship that is identified through symbols, public ceremonies, often in religious services of blessings. Visibility and public recognition of relationships helps them to grow.

Community support, encouragement, and care can help to keep the relationship healthy. Commitment ceremonies, couples counselling, pre-marital preparation courses, all help give relationships a solid footing. These community supports are often denied to same-sex couples, leaving them more isolated. If they encounter difficulties in their relationship there may be no support available.

The marriage relationship is recognized in society. It is also recognized in law, protecting both parties’ rights and privileges and ensuring the protection and care of any children in the family. Some examples of this legal recognition: married couples can adopt their step-children; in the case of divorce they have legal rights that govern fair property settlement, spousal or child support, access to children, the right to remain in the family home, etc.; they can sponsor their partner as an immigrant; they are protected by conflict of interest laws.

The marriage relationship is recognized in times of illness or death. A common-law or married spouse is considered the closest next of kin, and has the right to make decisions about medical or personal care or funerals and burial.

Married couples also have many financial rights and benefits, such as the right to be included on a company benefits plan, spousal income tax deductions, the right to inherit the estate of a deceased partner, or to receive pension or survivor benefits.

Why is Civil Recognition Important to Same-Sex Couples?

Sometimes gay and lesbian couples hear heterosexuals saying things like, “It’s ok with me if they’re gay, but why do they have to be so public about it?” Perhaps those asking are simply uncomfortable with homosexuality. Probably they don’t realize how often and in how many subtle and not so subtle ways they make their own relationship public—a wedding ring, a picture on desk, references in casual conversation, holding hands in a restaurant. Perhaps they don’t realize, because they simply take it for granted, how important it is to have one’s primary relationship recognized, honoured, and supported.

Here are some examples of rights, recognition, and privileges and their impact on same-sex couples and families:

Step-parent Rights: When married people have children from a previous marriage living with them, step-parents have the right, for example, to make emergency health care decisions for the children in the event of an emergency. Same-sex couples don’t.

Next-of-kin: Married couples are automatically defined as each other’s next of kin, allowing a partner to visit in hospital, make emergency medical decisions, inherit, make funeral arrangements, etc. Same-sex couples do not have this automatic protection.

Designated Waiting Period: Same-sex couples have to wait a designated period of time *after* living together to get health benefits or other rights that are accorded to common-law couples. Married couples receive these rights upon marriage.

Community Recognition and Support: Marriage is an important base of community, spiritual, and material support for new couples.

Workplace Benefits: Married partners receive benefits such as inclusion on health and dental plans, pension benefits, death benefits, etc. Same-sex couples may not, depending on the provincial legislation or the employee or group-plan provider.

Protection in Event of Relationship Breakdown: Married couples are automatically protected by legislation regarding the spousal home, property division and spousal support, should their relationship end. Same-sex couples do not have this protection.

Public Attitudes: Some provincial governments define heterosexual couples as “families,” while same-sex couples are defined as “households.” This kind of discrimination fosters prejudice against gay and lesbian families and their children.

Children: In some provinces, same-sex couples are restricted in their right to adopt as a couple. Depending on the province, same-sex couples may or may not have the same custody, support, and maintenance rights as heterosexual couples.

Why Marriage is Important to Some Gays and Lesbians

In Canada, marriage is historically, and today remains for many people, one of the most prominent ways in which two people's romantic love and commitment to each other are recognized and affirmed. Excluding same-sex couples from the institution of marriage sends a clear message that gays and lesbians are somehow not worthy of such recognition and affirmation. On the other hand, including same-sex couples in civil marriage would send a positive message to all Canadians, that regardless of the sex of the person one loves, that love will be valued honoured and affirmed.

Currently, most children are taught that they will grow up and marry someone of the opposite sex. However, when some of these children discover that they are gay or lesbian, they realize that they don't have the choice to marry. This realisation brings with it a strong sense of exclusion and alienation. Lesbians and gays also feel alienated when asked to celebrate the marriage of friends or family, knowing that society will not permit them to celebrate in the same way—simply because of who they love.

Before now, federal and provincial laws gave some legal recognition to same-sex couples, but lesbians and gays still could not legally obtain a recognized civil marriage.

Responsibility for marriage under the Canadian Constitution is divided between the federal and provincial governments. The federal government determines the definition of marriage, meaning who can marry whom, while the provinces issue marriage licences and determine the requirements of the marriage ceremony.

Until the announcement in June 2003 by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien that the Federal Government will draft legislation that will legally recognize same-sex marriages, Canada denied same-sex couples the right to marry, based on its view that marriage is restricted to a union between a woman and a man.

What is the Difference Between Religious and Civil Marriage? How Will Same-Sex Marriage Affect Religious Institutions?

Civil marriage is a marriage recognized by the state. All the legal rights and responsibilities accorded to those who are married are based on civil marriage. Religious institutions have the right to regulate who is married under the rules of the particular religion. This has no bearing on the recognition of civil marriages by the government.

Recent cases before the courts sought to enable same-sex couples to register a civil marriage, and to enable those churches that support same-sex marriage to issue marriage licences. They did not seek to require churches that oppose equal marriage rights to marry same-sex couples. Regardless of what rules are established for civil marriages, religious bodies will be able to establish their own rules for marriages conducted by them. This right is constitutionally protected in Canada. For example, even though civil marriage rules allow interfaith marriages, some religions do not permit such an activity. While some may argue that this is discrimination based on religion, the right of religious institutions to set such rules is clear.

Why Marriage? Aren't Civil Unions or Registered Domestic Partnerships Enough?

Although the rights and responsibilities associated with marriage can be extended through regimes such as civil unions or registered partnerships, this does not justify discriminating against same-sex couples by denying the full range of choices available to heterosexuals. So long as the federal government restricts marriage to heterosexuals only, it sends a message that same-sex couples are somehow inferior to their heterosexual counterparts. In addition, unlike marriage, civil union and registered partnership laws are not recognized outside the province in which they were enacted.

Isn't Marriage About Having and Raising Children?

It is true that many opposite-sex couples choose to marry at least in part for the benefit of their children. However, many married couples cannot or choose not to have children and they are not prevented from marrying.

Many same-sex couples do have children and allowing marriage would help protect these children. Allowing same-sex couples to marry will increase public acceptance of lesbians and gays, further supporting such families.

HANDOUT 10: RIGHTS OF SAME-SEX COUPLES IN CANADA

Federally

Federal court decisions, laws, and practices over the last few years have, for the most part, supported same-sex couples.

The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that laws failing to recognize same-sex couples as equal to others violates section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court has also declared that lawmakers, not the courts, are responsible for ending this discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

As an early step, in 1999 the Canadian government changed its Public Service Superannuation Act, which applies to federal employees only, by extending survivor benefits to same-sex couples. The term “surviving spouse” was replaced with the term “survivor,” and the words “of the opposite sex” were removed.

A major move was the federal government’s Bill C-23, which took effect in June 2000. It changed some 68 federal laws to give same-sex partners many social benefits and provisions previously available only to heterosexual couples. In terms of income tax, for example, people in same-sex relationships may now claim their partner and their partner’s children as dependents; claim medical and childcare expenses incurred by their partner or their partner’s children; take part in income-splitting arrangements; and after they die, pass on to their partner, tax free, their registered savings plan or income fund.

Federal Changes in Legislation

The federal government considered four options in its decision about whether or not marriage should remain heterosexual only.

These included:

1. Keeping the heterosexual definition of marriage. This is the status quo. Only male-female couples would be permitted to marry. Gay and lesbian couples could be entitled to the same rights and benefits as common-law couples, but would not be permitted to marry or to have the rights and benefits accorded married couples.
2. Creating an “equivalent to marriage for federal purposes” category for gay and lesbian couples. This would permit same-sex couples to register their relationship and would entitle them to benefits now accorded heterosexual married couples, but would be defined as a separate entity without use of the word “marriage.” This could be something akin to a Registered Domestic Partnership.

3. Changing the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples. This would permit lesbians and gays to marry, and would entitle married same-sex couples to all the rights and benefits of heterosexual married couples.
4. Having the federal government get out of the marriage business altogether, and leaving marriage in the hands of religious institutions. Under this option, all references to marriage would be removed from federal legislation and replaced with neutral language such as “registered domestic partner.” Same-sex and opposite-sex partners could register their relationships and be entitled to rights and benefits under federal legislation.

Census Recognition of Same-Sex Relationships

A significant sign of recognition of same-sex relationships appeared in the federal government’s 2001 census. For the first time, Canadians were asked about same-sex partnerships. The census asked people whether they were “living with a common-law partner,” which was defined to include both opposite- and same-sex partners. Also, the census stated that children of a common-law partner were to be considered sons and daughters. The figures showed that 34,200 same-sex common-law couples were counted in Canada in 2001, but most gay rights advocates and statisticians believe the number to be much lower than the true number of gay and lesbian couples.

Provinces and Territories

Discrimination against lesbians and gays as individuals is banned by law in all 10 provinces and in one of Canada’s three territories, the Yukon. However, the rights of gays and lesbians as same-sex couples and families vary across the country. For updated information on same-sex marriage rights across the province, please contact at:

EGALE (Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere)
205-176 Gloucester St.
Ottawa, ON K2P 0A6
Tel: 613-230-1043/ Fax 613-230-9395
Web site: www.egale.ca

HANDOUT 11:

CASE STUDIES

Case Study #1: Bill and Fred have lived together in an intimate relationship for 20 years. They are both approaching retirement age. They are co-owners of their house. They are fairly “out” to their family and friends, but have never discussed their relationship openly in their work situations. Bill has been having some heart problems recently. Bill has a son by a previous marriage with which he maintains a relationship, even though the son is a member of a conservative religious group that denounces gay and lesbian relationships.

Case Study #2: France and Loretta have been together for 12 years. Loretta was a single parent of a baby when they met, and they have raised the child together. France is employed part time. Full-time work in her field is hard to get in the area where they live, but it is important for them to live close to Loretta’s family-owned business, where Loretta works at least 50 to 60 hours a week. They often have money problems, and arguments about money, work, and time are putting a considerable strain on their relationship.

Case Study #3: Jo and Chris have just begun to date, and are considering entering into an intimate relationship. For both of them this is the first time they have dated since the end of long-term relationships. They feel very good about the time they spend together but are not sure if they are ready to make another long-term commitment. Both of them have recently come out to their families. This was a positive and affirming experience for Jo, but Chris’s family reacted very negatively, cutting off all contact. They both have a spiritual need—a shared sense of spirituality was one of the things that drew them together—but have not been able to find a faith community where they would be welcomed as a couple.

Case Study #4: Marti and Jean have had a relationship for two years. They moved in together a year ago. Jean’s two-year old granddaughter, Kate, is a frequent visitor in their home. Jean’s daughter is addicted to cocaine and cannot adequately care for Kate. Kate has cerebral palsy and cannot walk or speak. Marti and Jean both feel a very strong commitment to Kate and would like to adopt her. One of them would need to be home full-time to do this, but they are not sure if they can live on one salary, given that they are both still taxed as single people.

Questions to consider:

1. What kind of support do you think this family needs?
2. What kinds of formal or informal recognition or support exist for this family in your community?
3. How might greater recognition of their relationship, legally or in the community, benefit them?
4. What rights and privileges would this family have under the existing legislation in your province?
5. What rights or privileges that exist for heterosexual couples are denied to this family and how might that affect them?

WORKSHOP 4: TAKING ACTION

Purpose

- To help participants identify ways their congregation can welcome, honour, and celebrate lesbian and gay partnerships.
- To help participants act for justice on the issue of the civil recognition of same-sex relationships.

Preparation

- Bring writing paper and pens, newsprint, flip-chart stand, markers, and *Voices United*.
- If you have not done Workshop 3, bring copies of *Handout 9: Civil Recognition and Why It is Important to Same-Sex Couples* and *Handout 10: Rights of Same-Sex Couples in Canada*
- Make copies of *Handout 12: Sample Statements of Welcome and Inclusion* and *Handout 13: What Can We Do to Support the Civil Recognition of Same-Sex Couples?* Make copies of the discussion questions for the small groups.
- If you have an Affirming Congregation near you, invite someone from that congregation to join your group for this workshop. See the Resources section or check the list of Affirming Congregations (www.affirmunited.ca) on the Internet.
- If you did not do this in Workshop 3, ask someone who has access to the Internet to check The United Church of Canada Web site (www.united-church.ca) or the EGALÉ Web site (www.egale.ca) and bring to the group the latest information on the civil recognition of same-sex relationships both nationally and in your province or territory. Ask them to note also any action ideas or responses that are called for at this time (e.g. letter-writing campaigns or petitions).
- Have copies of *Handout 14: Resources and Contacts* and *Handout 15: Sample Letter to a Politician*

WORKSHOP PLAN:

Introduction (10 min.)

Welcome the group and make sure members know one another. Allow a time for introductions if necessary. Review the plan for the workshop and give any logistical information that may be required.

Prayer: O God of infinite possibilities, we gather together in hope and in commitment. By our actions, we seek in some small way to make this world more caring and gentle and just. We remember before you all those who may be affected by the work that we do: parents, friends, and

family members of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, people who are marginalized or discriminated against because of their sexual orientation, gay and lesbian couples and their children, people who are questioning or struggling with this issue in their own lives. May what we do and say be filled with your compassion. May what we accomplish be blessed by your love. Amen.

Sing: "God is Passionate Life" (*Voices United* #695).

OPTION FOR GROUPS DOING ONLY ONE WORKSHOP

What is Civil Recognition (15 min.)

If you have not done the first two workshops, give participants time to read Handout 9: Civil Recognition and Why It is Important to Same-Sex Couples and *Handout 10: Rights of Same-Sex Couples in Canada*. Discuss the following questions:

- What does the civil recognition of same-sex partnerships mean?
- Why do you think civil recognition is important?

Sharing Stories of Welcome and Inclusion (30 min.)

If you have invited a guest from an Affirming Congregation, invite your guest to speak about their own experience in a congregation that welcomes gay and lesbian couples and their families. Encourage group members to ask questions of the guest.

Considering Our Own Congregation (20 min.)

Invite the group to think of ways their congregation already welcomes and honours the relationships of gay and lesbian couples (e.g. pastoral care, involvement in church programs, etc.) Make a list of this on newsprint.

Discussion:

- What might it be like for your congregation to welcome, honour, and celebrate the relationships of lesbian and gay couples? How do you feel about this?
- How would you feel about the celebration of covenants or marriages taking place in your congregation?
- What concerns or feelings do you have about this?

Option 1: Write a Statement of Inclusion (30 min.)

Hand out copies of *Handout 12: Sample Statements of Welcome and Inclusion*, and paper and pens. Ask participants to read them and note any points that they like in the statements.

Work together as a group to make your own statement. It may be very different from the statements in the handout, but should be one that group members are generally comfortable with. If your group has more than 10 participants, divide into smaller groups for this task and gather back to share your statements together.

Option 2: Assess the Situation in Your Congregation (30 min.)

Divide into small groups. Ask each group to have someone record their conversation. Ask each group to discuss the current situation in your own congregation, using the following questions as a guide:

- What is the level of awareness about same-sex relationships?
- What support and recognition does your congregation offer to same-sex couples (e.g. pastoral care, inclusion in church directory, baptisms of children of same-sex couples, same-sex cohabitating or marriage, etc.)?
- What advocacy or action, if any, has taken place in the wider community?
- What kind of welcome and inclusion is offered to gay and lesbian couples and their families?

In the whole group, hear a report from each small group and discuss:

- What are the key areas where change is needed in our congregation?
- What action can we take next?

Option 3: Planning for Action (30 min.)

Divide into groups of 5-6 people. Give everyone a copy of *Handout 13: What Can We Do to Support the Civil Recognition of Same-Sex Couples?* Ask small groups to work on the following tasks:

1. Decide upon one concrete action that you think it is feasible to take action on. This idea might come from the action ideas, be a modification of one of those ideas, or another idea the group has. How would this action help support the civil recognition of same-sex partnerships?
2. Spell out the idea. Be specific about what you would do and how and when you could do it.
3. Identify what resources you would need and what obstacles you might encounter.
4. Prepare to present your idea to the whole group; prepare a newsprint summary of your plan.

Making Decisions, Planning Next Steps (30 min.)

Gather back in the whole group. Hear the action ideas from each group.

Ask the group to select one or two ideas that they would like to work on as a group. Some ideas may end up being combined or modified in the process of the discussion.

- What needs to happen next?

Make a list on newsprint of the things that need to be done

- Who will take responsibility for the next step?

Add names to each task listed on newsprint.

- When will we meet again?

Closing (10 min.)

Sing “Will You Come and Follow Me” (*Voices United* #567).

Closing Blessing:

Go from this place to live out our ministry as followers of Jesus Christ. May the love of God, the blessing of God, and the power of God, the peace of God, go with us and remain with us in all that we do. Amen.

HANDOUT 12: SAMPLE STATEMENTS OF WELCOME AND INCLUSION

Centenary-Queen Square United Church, Saint John

This statement was made by Centenary-Queen Square United Church when it became an Affirming Congregation in 2001:

In response to God's call, Centenary-Queen Square United Church is committed to welcoming and accepting all people regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, differing abilities, ethnic background, or economic circumstance. Following Jesus' example and teaching, we work for justice and inclusion by offering love, hope and compassion through worship, study, and service.

Augustine United Church, Winnipeg

This was the statement made by Augustine United Church when it became an Affirming Congregation in 1995:

As an Affirming Congregation Augustine is a community that welcomes, recognizes, and accepts homosexual people in our midst as full and equal participants in all aspects of life, work, and worship.

The implications of this are:

- a. Acknowledging and endorsing the skills and gifts of homosexual people for lay and ordered ministry;
- b. Facilitating and celebrating in our sanctuary same-sex covenants as authentic expressions of interpersonal Christian commitment;
- c. Being open to receiving homosexual people as staff persons;
- d. Ensuring that sexual orientation is not a consideration in the hiring process for any staff or ministry position, including student internships;
- e. As part of our overall concern for justice, actively supporting concerns of homosexual people;
- f. Providing support for families and friends of homosexuals;
- g. Teaching and learning about concerns of homosexual and heterosexual people in a two-way process of mutual listening and understanding.

The above statement reflects our current understanding. It is intentional and public. We respect the right of individuals to exercise their own choice in terms of declaration of orientation. We welcome all people to join in this celebration of acceptance.

Bloor Street United Church, Toronto

This was the statement made by Bloor Street United Church when it became an Affirming Congregation in 1997:

We believe that all people are created in the image of God and are unconditionally loved by God. All persons are free to enjoy God's gifts of love, joy, and intimacy.

We lament injustice done to gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons in church and society.

We, the people of Bloor Street United Church, are committed to creating a community where all people are welcome regardless of age, sex, race, sexual orientation, differing abilities, ethnic background, or economic circumstance.

We seek to use the gifts of all persons in every aspect of congregational life, including designated ministry, regardless of sexual orientation. We pray for God's spirit to guide us as we work for reconciliation and justice for all persons in both church and society.

Trinity-St. Paul's United Church, Toronto

In 1997, when it became an Affirming Congregation, Trinity-St. Paul's amended its mission statement to read in part as follows:

Worship of God, nurture of one another, and struggle to be faithful to God's will lie at the centre of our community and outreach.

We affirm that all who seek to live faithfully regardless of ability, age, class, ethnicity, gender, race or sexual orientation are full participants; and are all urged to take full responsibility in the life, membership, and leadership of the congregation.

Trinity United Church, Vancouver

In 1997 Trinity became an Affirming Congregation, the first in B.C. We declare that our life together will be fully inclusive of gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, those of all ages and differing abilities, ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic status. Our Statement of Faith and Action:

We affirm that with God's help we will:
hear and respect each other's stories, skills, and gifts
embrace the leadership and service of all
have inclusive hiring practices
create a safe environment where people are protected from violation, abuse and discrimination
speak out against injustice honour each other's life passages in liturgy and celebration, including covenanting ceremonies, dedication of children, rituals of baptism, healing, death and dying.

As we continue our discovery of what it means to be an inclusive community, we understand that teaching and learning about each other is a process of mutual listening and understanding.

First United Church, Ottawa

First United Church became an Affirming Congregation in 2002, making this statement of inclusion:

We, the congregation of First United Church, Ottawa, declare our commitment to be fully inclusive of people of all sexual orientations (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual) and of transgender people.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we will seek to:

- create a safe, respectful, and welcoming community
- celebrate the gifts of one another
- receive with gratitude the leadership, service, and ministry of one another
- celebrate and honour the life passages of all (covenanting, baptisms, blessings, healing, death and dying)
- work for justice, dignity and inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in the church and in society
- continue our discovery of what it means to be an inclusive community
- continue to be challenged to greater inclusion and justice seeking for all people

HANDOUT 13: WHAT CAN WE DO TO SUPPORT THE CIVIL RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX COUPLES?

There have been enormous changes in attitudes towards homosexuality, in church and in society, and there are many communities and congregations where people in same-sex relationships find the support they need. But there is still room for change.

It is helpful for congregations that do offer welcome and acceptance to make that known and visible in the community. Not only does this let same-sex families know where they can find support, it also sends an important message to the community—a message that can help change public attitudes and counteract violence or harassment.

Although there has been some progress, there are still many gaps and inconsistencies in policy and legislation across the country that need to be addressed. Advocacy and action play an important role, especially given the fact that legislators and courts receive so much pressure from groups and individuals opposed to human rights for lesbians and gays.

ACTION IDEAS

Groups or Individuals

- Write to your MP or MPP/MLA/MNA and let them know that you support full rights for same-sex couples. Mention any changes in legislation you want or support. Ask questions to ensure you get a response. Follow up with phone calls.
- Write a letter to a local newspaper on court cases or changes in the law. Be specific. Be personal.
- Join an organization that supports civil recognition for same-sex couples. See *Handout 14: Resources and Contacts*.
- Keep informed. The groups listed below, or a local action group can be an important source of information.
- Speak out against harassment. Challenge homophobic language or attitudes.

Congregations

- Become an Affirming Congregation.
- Continue to study the issue of homosexuality.
- Develop a supportive policy regarding same-sex covenanting or marriage.
- Welcome same-sex couples and their families into your community.
- Contact other congregations and let them know what you're doing and why you support this issue.
- Include this issue, and the needs and rights of same-sex couples in congregational worship (sermons, prayers, announcements, etc).
- Hold a congregational or regional workshop on the issue of civil recognition for same-sex couples. See the resources listed in *Handout 14: Resources and Contacts*.
- Offer support to local organizations that address issues of sexual orientation. Support anti-harassment programs.
- If harassment of same-sex couples takes place in your community, develop a response. Invite others in the community, and other churches, to join you in speaking out.

HANDOUT 14: RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

The United Church of Canada

The Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit of The United Church of Canada has produced workshop resources, information sheets and pamphlets on issues of sexual orientation and on civil recognition of same-sex partnerships. More information can be obtained by contacting:

The Human Rights and Reconciliation Program
Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations
The United Church of Canada
3250 Bloor St. West, Ste. 300
Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4
Tel.: 416-231-5931
www.united-church.ca

Affirm United / The Affirming Ministries Program

Since 1982, this network has been working for full inclusion for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people in The United Church of Canada. Affirm promotes education and action, including rights, and civil recognition for same-sex couples. In 1992 the Affirming Congregation program was launched to help congregations study issues of inclusion and make a public statement of welcome and of commitment to action. The Affirm United newsletter, *Consensus*, provides information, analysis, personal stories, and support for local groups and congregations.

Affirm United
PO Box 333, Stn. Q,
Toronto ON M4T 2M5
E-mail: affirmu@aol.com
www.affirmunited.ca

EGALE (Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere)

EGALE is a national organization that advances equality and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people, and their families, across Canada. EGALE lobbies for equality, works for justice in the courts, and maintains an action and communication network across Canada. EGALE monthly newsletters and Web updates give comprehensive information on the issues. EGALE has been a leader in promoting civil-recognition and rights for same-sex couples.

EGALE
205-176 Gloucester St.
Ottawa, ON K2P 0A6
Tel.: 613-230-1043 / Fax: 613-230-9395
E-mail: john@egale.ca
www.egale.ca

HANDOUT 15: SAMPLE LETTER TO A POLITICIAN

[Insert your address or use the church letterhead if you are writing on behalf of the congregation]

January 15, 2004 [the date]

Ms. Jane Brown, M.P.
[Address]
K0A 3G0

Dear Ms. Brown,

[To find out the name, spelling, address and correct title of a federal official or elected representative contact Information Canada: 1-800-622-6232 or 613-941-4823. Contact your province or territory's information line by using the blue pages in your phone book.]

We are writing on behalf of... [State the congregation or constituency you represent; for MPs votes count—it matters that you are not just writing as an individual but that you represent the opinions of a larger group.]

or

I am writing... [Letters from individuals count, since it is assumed that for every person who writes a letter there are many more people who feel the same way.]

to express my concern about the proposed legislation Bill c-xxx [Be as specific as possible about the issue or concern you are addressing; you don't have to be an expert, but it does help to show that you are informed.]

We strongly support this legislation because...

or

We are concerned about this proposed legislation because...

[Give your reasons for concern or support; be specific about how this legislation may affect you or your community and what you feel are the implications of this legislation.]

We urge you to ... [Ask for specific action; say what you want this person to do.]

We would like to know... [Ask a specific question. Do you personally support this legislation? What is your party's position on this? etc. Asking a specific question means that your letter will receive a timely reply.]

Yours sincerely,

PART 2:

**CONGREGATIONAL DECISION-MAKING ON
SAME-SEX MARRIAGE**

PART 2: CONGREGATIONAL DECISION-MAKING ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

This section provides information and a process to help congregations make an informed decision or set congregational policy regarding same-sex marriage services.

SECTION 1: UNITED CHURCH PROCEDURE AND MODELS FOR CONGREGATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

United Church Procedure

Each individual United Church congregation or pastoral charge sets its own policy related to marriage services. Congregations that offer same-sex covenanting ceremonies or same-sex marriages make this decision in the council or official board. In some cases the whole congregation may be asked to consider and decide the issue, but typically the congregation is invited to have input through an educational and discernment process.

Some boards or councils have made the decision and then informed the congregation. Others have held a process of congregational discussion, reflection, and discernment prior to making a decision. They may do this in order to inform the congregation about the issue under discussion and to help the congregation's decision-making bodies hear the concerns and opinions of the wider congregation.

Congregations often feel more empowered if they are involved in the discussion from the outset. However, the board or council may feel they can legitimately make this decision on behalf of the congregation. Either way, a process of education and reflection is helpful so that members of the congregation are fully informed and aware of the implications of such action.

Models for Congregational Decision-Making

The congregation or minister receives a request from a couple seeking to have a marriage service or, the congregation decides that it wants to develop a congregational policy on same-sex marriage.

The issue goes to Session or Council.

The Session, Board, or Council then has several options:

- 1) The Session, Council, or Official Board discusses the issue thoroughly, with background information provided and an opportunity for members to learn about the issues. They may use this process as a basis for learning more about the issues, and sharing concerns, opinions, and feelings. The Session, Board, or Council then makes a decision about this request and informs the congregation of its decision, with an educational process to follow.

or

- 2) The Session, Board, or Council discusses the issue thoroughly and decides to hold an educational and discernment process prior to making its decision. A congregational educational and discernment process helps the congregation feel heard, and identifies concerns and feelings and issues that need to be addressed. The following strategies may help the members learn more and give input:

- Background information. Over a series of weeks, the following articles are provided to congregational members: *Handout 2: Personal Stories*, *Handout 6: Faith Reflections*, *Handout 8: The United Church Position*, *Handout 9: Civil Recognition*, *Handout 12: Sample Statements of Welcome and Inclusion*, and *Handout 16: FAQs*.
- Book display or information table with material on same-sex families.
- Articles in the church newsletter.
- A “question box” or place where members can note their questions or concerns.
- Occasions when members can share concerns or information.
- Opportunities to meet and hear from people in same-sex covenanted relationships, e.g. sermons, informal gatherings, presentations, etc.
- Workshops on the issue of same-sex covenanting are offered. *Section 2: Understanding Same-Sex Marriage Services: A Discernment and Information Process for Congregations* helps participants to learn more about the same-sex covenanting and to share concerns, opinions, and feelings. *Workshop 1: Understanding the Issues* provides a more general background sexuality and same-sex partnerships, if this is needed.

Members of Session, Board, or Council listen carefully to the needs, concerns and opinions of congregational members. This input may inform their decision or if the decision has already been made, this input may help them identify other action or discussion that is needed in the congregation.

or

- 3) A congregational meeting is held to make a decision on this issue.

SECTION 2: UNDERSTANDING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE SERVICES: A DISCERNMENT AND INFORMATION PROCESS FOR CONGREGATIONS

Purpose

To help participants learn more about same-sex covenanting.

To help participants share their concerns, opinions, and feelings related to their congregation's decision to offer same-sex covenanting ceremonies.

Preparation

- Ahead of the session, give participants *Handout 8: The United Church Position* and *Handout 6: Faith Reflections*. Have extra copies available at the workshop.
- Bring writing paper and pens, newsprint, flip-chart stand, markers, four candles, matches, and *Voices United*.
- Invite a guest—someone who has participated in a same-sex covenanting, someone who is in a same-sex covenanted relationship, or someone who attended a covenanting celebration or marriage—to talk about their experience.
- Make copies of *Handout 16: FAQs on Same-Sex Marriage Ceremonies in The United Church of Canada* and *Handout 17: Change-Making*.
- Make copies of discussion questions for small groups or post them where they will be visible to all.
- Arrange for recorders or “listeners”—people who are prepared to record the concerns and issues identified throughout the session. Facilitators for small-group discussions may be helpful.
- Ask four volunteers to light the candles at the indicated sections in the opening litany. Ask four people to read one of the four voices in litany.

WORKSHOP PLAN

Opening (10 min.)

Welcome the group and introduce your guest. Review the plan for the workshop and give any logistical information that may be helpful.

Explain the purpose of this day (see above). Note that this is not a decision-making session but rather that is intended to build greater awareness of the issues and of concerns, feelings and

opinions about this issue. This is a listening time—listening to new information, listening to one another, and listening for the wisdom of the Spirit.

Explain that throughout the workshop there will be moments of prayerful silence, for people to think about what they have heard and to listen for the voice of the Spirit in their midst. If your congregation is going to be making a decision about same-sex covenanting ceremonies, explain how, when, and where that decision will be made. If a policy already exists, explain what it is.

Sing “Spirit of Life” (*Voices United* #381).

Litany

Voice One: O Wise Spirit, fill us with understanding. Open our ears to hear your truth. Help us to listen carefully to one another.

All: Spirit of life, come unto us (a candle is lit, followed by a brief period of silence).

Voice Two: O Gentle Spirit, touch our hearts. Fill us with compassion. Help us to be gentle and tender-hearted with one other.

All: Spirit of life, come unto us (a candle is lit, silence).

Voice Three: O Dancing Spirit, fill us with delight. Help us to rejoice in all that is loving. Help us to celebrate all that gives wholeness and life.

All: Spirit of life, come unto us (a candle is lit, silence).

Voice Four: O Creative Spirit, bring us to birth. Make something new of us and of this day. Stir in us new vision. Create in us a new heaven.

All: Spirit of life, come unto us (a candle is lit, silence). Amen.

Sharing Hopes and Fears (15-20 min.)

Ask people to form small groups of 5-6 people. Ask people in turn to share some of their hopes and their fears about this issue (both hopes and fears, not just one or the other). Encourage people to listen carefully without judging each other, and to share the time so that everyone has an opportunity to talk.

Background Information (15 min.)

If you have not previously shared this information, give participants *Handout 8: The United Church Position* and *Handout 6: Faith Reflections*. Distribute *Handout 16: FAQs on Same-Sex Marriage Ceremonies in The United Church of Canada*. Give people time to read these articles.

Pause for a moment of silence, inviting people to listen for the voice of the Spirit in what they have read.

Invite questions for clarification. Discuss the following questions in small groups:

- Did any of this information surprise you? Which parts?
- Which parts of the United Church policy on this issue are you comfortable with? What concerns do you have?
- What questions do you have about the information you have received?

Guest Speaker: Experiencing a Same-Sex Marriage Service (15 min.)

Invite your guest to talk to the group about their experience of a same-sex covenanting service.

Pause for a moment of silence, inviting people to listen for the voice of the Spirit in what they have heard.

A Congregation's Experience (15 min.)

Give people copies of *Handout 17: Change-Making* and ask them to read it for themselves. Ask them to consider in silence the following questions:

- What were some of the opportunities that opened up for this congregation because it made the decision?
- What were some of the risks or potential losses it might have incurred?

Opportunities and Risks (10-15 min.)

Gather back the whole group. Explain that everyone will be compiling two lists—one will be a list of the opportunities or potential gains or benefits for this congregation if it offers same-sex covenanting services. The other will be a list of potential losses or risks if the congregation offers covenanting services. Some items may appear on both lists—for example, there may be the risk of losing some members, or the opportunity to gain new members, whichever way the decision goes. Encourage people to see these lists not as “for” and “against”—those who are in favour of doing covenanting ceremonies are encouraged to identify potential risks or losses, and those opposed are encouraged to name potential gains or opportunities.

Ask the group to share opportunities and risks, in a brainstorming fashion, without debate. Have several recorders quickly jotting down comments on newsprint sheets.

What Do You Want Them to Hear? (15 min.)

Ask people in their small groups to make a list of things that they think the Session, Board, or Council should pay attention to or take into account as they move forward on this issue (either things that should be considered before making a decision or things to consider now that a decision has been made). Ask groups to appoint someone to record the discussion. Ask each group to identify the top items from its list—areas that seem most important for the congregation to pay attention to—and to find someone in the group who can report that back.

Report Back (5-10 min.)

Explain that all the small group concerns (and their notes) will be carried forward for further discussion at Session, Council, or Board. This is just a way to let the whole group hear some of the issues that were identified. Ask each group to share its top two concerns.

Closing (5 min.)

Sing “May the God of Hope” (*Voices United* #424).

Closing Blessing:

May the God of justice renew our vision. May the God of love fill us with compassion for one another. May the God of power give us strength. May the God of hope illumine our path. And, may the God of peace bless us always. Amen.

HANDOUT 16: FAQs ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE CEREMONIES IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

Q. Why might marriage or same-sex covenanting be important to gay and lesbian couples?

- A. In Canada, marriage is historically, and today remains for many people, one of the most prominent ways in which two people's romantic love and commitment to each other are recognized and affirmed. A covenanting ceremony can be an important way for same-sex couples to declare their commitment to the relationship, to make promises of love and faithfulness in the presence of God and their faith community, and to receive the support and affirmation of their family and friends.

Q. What is the United Church policy on same-sex marriage services?

- A. Since 1990, the United Church has officially recognized the role of congregations and ministers in supporting and celebrating same-sex unions. By that time, there were already many congregations and ministry personnel offering services of covenant and blessing. In 1992, the General Council requested liturgical and pastoral resources to help same-sex couples make their relationships permanent through "same-sex covenants." In 2000 the United Church General Council officially affirmed its support for same-sex partnerships. The church committed itself to actively work for the civil recognition of such unions, recognizing them in church documentation (e.g. marriage registers) and in services of blessing. The 38th General Council in 2003 resolved to call on the federal government to recognize same-sex marriage in federal law.

Q. Who decides if a congregation will offer same-sex marriage services?

- A. Each United Church congregation or pastoral charge sets its own policy related to same-sex covenanting, just as it does on marriage services. Congregations that offer same-sex covenanting ceremonies make this decision in the council or official board. In some cases the whole congregation may be asked to decide the issue. Usually the congregation is invited to have input through an educational and discernment process.

Q. Is a same-sex marriage always recorded in the church register?

- A. The register is required for legal marriages which are currently restricted to Ontario and British Columbia for same-sex couples. However, many churches do record same-sex marriage services in the register in order to treat the covenanting just like any other service, which the church would perform. If a same-sex couple desire confidentiality, they could ask the minister to not record the covenant in the church register.

Q. Does the minister need the permission of anyone to perform a same-sex marriage ceremony?

- A. Ministers who are settled or appointed to a Pastoral Charge perform marriages as part of their pastoral duties. Ministers are not independent civil "marriage commissioners". The governing

body of a congregation—the Session, Board or Council—has oversight of the spiritual interests of the congregation. Section 153 of The Manual states that it is the duty of the governing body of a congregation to oversee the order of worship. Thus it is the congregation’s governing body that has authority to set policies around marriage ceremonies. As part of that policy, the governing body should address whether marriages may be performed outside of the church building in other private or public locations.

Q. Is pre-marital preparation required for same-sex couples?

- A. The United Church of Canada urges congregations to provide preparation for marriage. Most ministers offer or refer couples for pre-marital counselling or preparation. If they do same-sex covenanting services, their policy would be the same for all couples.

Q. How would a same-sex couple find out which congregations or ministers perform same-sex marriage services?

- A. Presbytery or conference staff will usually know which congregations and ministers offer same-sex ceremonies. All of the Affirming congregations do so, and ministers in those congregations can often make referrals to other congregations or clergy. To obtain a list of Affirming congregations, see the list at the back of this resource, or go to the Affirm United Web site (www.affirmunited.ca). You may also write to: Affirm United, P.O. Box 333, Station Q, Toronto, ON M4T 2M5.

Q. What is the United Church position on separation or “divorce” for same-sex couples?

- A. The United Church does not consider marriage a sacrament. However, it does place an extremely high value on the seriousness of vows taken before God and in the presence of witnesses. The church’s position is to support life-long relationships of care, justice, mutuality, and faithfulness. These same standards apply to both homosexual and heterosexual couples. However, the church does not condemn people who decide divorce or separation is the only path open to them. If a couple cannot continue together they will still receive the grace of God and the communion of the church.

Q. What kinds of policies do congregations have about same-sex marriage?

- A. Many congregations have not yet made a decision. A few have decided not to offer same-sex marriage services but do make referrals to congregations that do so. Some congregations offer same-sex covenanting to members and adherents only, others to anyone who requests it. Some follow the same guidelines as for heterosexual marriages, while others have a separate policy for gay and lesbian marriages.

HANDOUT 17: CHANGE-MAKING

How a United Church Developed Policies for Same-Sex Covenanting

By Alyson C. Huntly

In August, 1988, The United Church of Canada made a landmark decision that sexual orientation would not be grounds to exclude anyone from membership or from ministry. Some people feared, and others hoped, that this decision would open the doors to even wider tolerance and acceptance.

“Why, we might even see people of the same gender getting married in our churches!” declared one outraged opponent. And so they are. Many clergy and congregations officiate at same-sex covenanting services. Several United Church congregations have explicit policies supporting this.

Last September, at Trinity-St. Paul’s United Church in downtown Toronto, Teresa Burnett and her life-partner Ruth Cole held a ceremony of celebration and commitment. The Rev. Joan Wyatt, ordained minister at Trinity-St. Paul’s, officiated.

“God comes to us in relationship,” explained Wyatt, and so “it’s natural” to want to draw us together in community and “invoke God’s presence now and in the ongoing relationship.”

The Trinity-St. Paul’s congregation has traveled far since its earliest discussions of homosexuality. In the early 80s the presence of an openly lesbian candidate put the issue squarely in front of the congregation. The debate at first was rancorous, at times painful. But by the time Burnett and Cole held their covenanting, the congregation had a clearly developed policy of inclusion and acceptance, including same-sex covenanting.

In 1994, Trinity-St. Paul’s embarked on a process to become an “Affirming Congregation” within the United Church. A committee was formed in the congregation to guide the process. Subsequent meetings and congregational study sessions looked at all aspects of congregational life. In a series of educational sessions, the congregation was invited to watch videos, talk about their own feelings, and hear personal stories. The final stage of the process included a review of the congregation’s mission statement to specifically include lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

An “affirming congregation” statement and “affirmative action policy” completed the process. The board approved a policy statement amending the congregations mission statement as follows: “We affirm that all who seek to live faithfully, regardless of ability, age, ethnicity, sex, race, or sexual orientation are full participants and we urge all to take responsibility in the life, membership, and leadership in the church.”

While the congregation was basically supportive of sexual orientation issues, it was recognized that further work was needed “to carry forward the work involved in becoming a congregation that affirms people of all sexual orientations” particularly in areas such as “pastoral care, outreach to other congregations, awareness building, and development of same-sex covenanting services.”

It was clear to Wyatt and others at Trinity-St. Paul's that amending the mission statement automatically paved the way for same-sex covenanting. "Becoming an Affirming Congregation meant that we would do same-sex covenanting," said Wyatt, "that has been the case for awhile, but now we are open about it and are explicitly stating that's who we are and this is what we do."

Initially, the congregation agreed that the same policy would be applied to same-sex couples as for heterosexual ones, that is, that couples had to be actively connected to the congregation. The congregation does not perform marriages "off the street," as Wyatt put it. However, the policy was later amended to be more inclusive of homosexual than heterosexual couples. "We realized we needed to offer services to all couples" regardless of whether they are members at Trinity-St. Paul's, said Wyatt, because there are so many congregations that are still exclusive. "They may not be able to have same-sex covenanting within their own congregation."

A policy change to this effect passed easily at the Official Board. Trinity-St. Paul's has just added a line to its masthead declaring itself to be an Affirming Congregation.

This article originally appeared in *Consensus*, February, 1997. Used with permission.

RESOURCES

RESOURCES

Print Resources

Many of the following print resources may be available through the United Church Resource Distribution service (UCRD). Call 1-800-288-7365 or 416-253-5456 to ask if UCRD carries the item in stock or if it can be ordered for you.

Daring to Be United: Including Lesbians and Gays in The United Church of Canada. By Alyson C. Huntly (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1998). This book documents the changes within The United Church of Canada on its journey with issues of sexual orientation, including the debate on sexual orientation and ministry. It includes stories of individuals, groups, and congregations, same-sex covenanting, as well as information on Affirming congregations.

Together in Faith: Inclusive Resources about Sexual Diversity for Dialogue, Celebration, and Action. (Toronto: Division of Mission in Canada, The United Church of Canada, 1995). This resource contains workshops and complementary study resources to help congregations understand issues of sexual diversity and to facilitate exploration and discussion. One workshop deals with same-sex covenanting services. Another workshop provides a process to help congregations become more inclusive of the gifts and ministry of lesbians and gays.

Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology. By Richard Cleaver. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995). This provides material for theological reflection on gay issues, based on a number of biblical themes and passages.

Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? A Positive Christian Response. By Virginia R. Mollenkott and Letha Dawson Scanzoni (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994 revised and updated edition). Chronicles a journey of two friends, both theologians and biblical scholars, one gay and one straight, in their struggle to come to terms with the Bible and Christian teaching about homosexuality.

Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible. By Nancy Wilson (New York: HarperCollins, 1995). Written in a conversational style, from a lesbian Christian perspective. This book offers good material on theology and the Bible.

Living in Sin?: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality. By John Shelby Spong (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1990). Theological and biblical reflections on human sexuality.

Ceremonies of the Heart: Celebrating Lesbian Unions. By Becky Butler (Seattle: Seal Press, 1990). Liturgical ideas, resources, and commentary.

Daring to Speak Love's Name: A Gay and Lesbian Prayer Book. By Elizabeth Stuart (New York: Penguin USA, 1993).

Shaping Sanctuary. Edited by Kelly Turney (Chicago: Reconciling Congregation Program, 2000).

Periodicals

Consensus

The quarterly newsletter of Affirm United, 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 United Church of Canada. Each issue of *Consensus* has a mix of articles on the work of Affirm United, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered rights, information on Affirming Congregations, such as a complete listing, profiles of new Congregations, and stories about the work of Affirming congregations. To subscribe, write to: Affirm United, P.O. Box 333, Stn. Q, Toronto ON M4T 2M5. Or send an e-mail message to affirm@aol.com. Back issues of *Consensus* can also be found on the Web site of Affirm United (www.affirmunited.ca).

Children's Books

Asha's Mums. By Rosamund Elwin and Michele Paulse (Toronto: Women's Press, 1990).

This was the children's picture book that was banned by the Surrey, B.C. school board because it says it's OK for a child to have two mothers. It tells the story of a little girl who can't go on a school trip because she filled out the parent permission sheet "wrongly"—the teacher tells her she can't have two mums, but she does.

One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads. By Johnny Valentine and Melody Sarecky (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, Inc., 1994). A girl who is the same colour as her father meets Lou, whose two fathers are blue, and wonders if they do things differently from her father, and asks how they became blue.

Youth

Coming Out Young and Faithful. By Leanne McCall Tigert and Timothy Brown (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2001). This is a collection of personal stories from gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered youth and young adults—some of them in the church and some not. It's a good account of what youth experience and a source of helpful first-person testimonies.

Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth Issues in Canada: Action Resources for United Church Congregations (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2003). Young people coming to terms with their sexual orientation find themselves torn between "coming out" and risking rejection, discrimination, and abuse—or concealing their identity, leading to loneliness, alienation, and shame. This resource will help families and congregations explore ways to be supportive and creative about caring for young people in these situations.

GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS

The Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit, The United Church of Canada

The unit has produced workshop resources, information sheets, and pamphlets on issues of sexual orientation and civil recognition of same-sex partnerships. For more information, contact:

The Human Rights and Reconciliation Program, JGER Unit
The United Church of Canada
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 300
Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4
Tel.: 416-231-5931, ext. 4061 or 4046.
Web site: www.united-church.ca

Affirm United / The Affirming Ministries Program

Since 1982, this network has been working for full inclusion of all people in The United Church of Canada regardless of sexual orientation. Affirm promotes education and action, including rights and civil recognition for same-sex couples. In 1992, the Affirming Congregation program was launched to help congregations study issues of inclusion and make a public statement of welcome and of commitment to action. The Affirm United newsletter, *Consensus*, provides information, analysis, personal stories, and support for local groups and congregations.

Affirm United
PO Box 333, Stn Q,
Toronto ON M4T 2M5
E-mail: affirmu@aol.ca
Web site: www.affirmunited.ca

For a complete list of Affirming Congregations in The United Church of Canada, see pg. 78.

EGALE

EGALE is a national organization that advances equality and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people, and their families, across Canada. EGALE lobbies for equality, works for justice in the courts, and maintains an action and communication network across Canada. EGALE monthly newsletters and Web updates give comprehensive information on the issues. EGALE has been a leader in promoting civil-recognition and rights for same-sex couples.

EGALE National Headquarters
205-176 Gloucester St.
Ottawa, ON K2P 0A6
Tel.: 613-230-1043 / Fax: 613-230-9395
E-mail: john@egale.ca; Web site: www.egale.ca

Canadians For Equal Marriage

Canadians for Equal Marriage,
410 Sherbourne Street, Main Floor,
Toronto, ON, M4X 1K2

Phone: 416-972-7481

webmaster@equal-marriage.ca

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

PFLAG is a national organization that promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons, their families and friends through: support—to cope with an adverse society, and education—to enlighten an ill-informed public in order to end discrimination and secure equal human rights.

PFLAG provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.

The PFLAG Canada Directory

PFLAG has active chapters in most Canadian cities. They offer education, support, and advocacy work on issues of sexual orientation and are a good source of information on other groups and networks in the community. To find out about the nearest group to you, contact:

PFLAG Brampton/Mississauga
35 Willis Drive
Brampton, ON L6W 1B2
Tel.: 905-457-4570
Web site: www.pflag.ca

Videos

One of Them

A group of teenagers is planning Human Rights Day at their high school. Carla and Jamie believe that homophobia should be included, alongside racism and sexism, as forms of prejudice. The two students encounter opposition and, through some surprising and touching twists, come to a better understanding of honesty and friendship in this short drama. National Film Board. Available online at: www.nfb.ca.

Out: Stories of Lesbian and Gay Youth

This is an intimate exploration of the struggles and victories of gay and lesbian youth in Canada. Delving into the emotional, societal and familial conflicts lesbian and gay youth often face, this film breaks the damaging silence surrounding sexual orientation and sexual differences.

Through explicit interviews with gay and lesbian youth from varied cultural and racial heritages, issues of discrimination as well as the compounding problems of confronting racism and sexism are sensitively addressed. *Out* provides awareness, understanding and hope—to gay and lesbian

youth, parents, counsellors and educators. National Film Board. Available to borrow through AVEL outlets.

In Other Words

Name-calling and cruel language hurt, say the teens who speak in this documentary video. Homophobic language is a common verbal put-down among young people, but many adults feel uncomfortable responding.

In Other Words speaks directly to teens and offers a valuable tool to teachers, counsellors, and community youth leaders who want to explore the homophobic language heard in schools and other youth hangouts—the words themselves, their origins, how young people feel about them, and how to overcome the hurt and anger they cause.

Moving interviews with gay, lesbian, and transgendered teens provide first-hand accounts. Weaving together slang, music media images, and dictionary definitions, the film examines how language shapes attitude. The video is designed to foster change and to ensure that schools are safe places where youth can learn in a climate of respect. National Film Board. Available to borrow through AVEL outlets.

Stolen Moments

Stolen Moments is about the personal testimony of past and present courage and passion; about re-enacted moments from lesbian history; about yesterday's oppression and today's resistance; about song and dance, ritual and performance...about crossing boundaries. Giving voice to stories that have been scattered or buried, rendering a shadowy history visible, *Stolen Moments* chronicles the past—and the future—of lesbians in society. National Film Board. Available on-line at: www.nfb.ca.

Casting Out Fear

This video tells the stories of gays and lesbians in the church. Prepared by the Reconciling Congregation Program of the United Methodist church, the video shows how members and clergy of a congregation came to the point of being a church that welcomes and affirms gay and lesbian people and the effect this had on the life of the congregation. Available to borrow through AVEL outlets.

Web sites

www.equalmarriage.ca

This Web site is maintained by Kevin Bourassa and Joe Varnell who were married at Metropolitan Community Church in Toronto in January, 2000. This site provides up to date, comprehensive coverage of same-sex marriage issues in Canada and world wide.

webmaster@equal-marriage.ca

Web site for Canadian for Equal Marriage

AFFIRMING MINISTRIES IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

Augustine United Church
444 River Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R3L 0C7
Tel.: 204-284-2250

Bathurst United Church
427 Bloor St. West
Toronto, ON M5S 1X7
Tel.: 416-921-4967

Bloor Street United Church
300 Bloor St. West
Toronto, ON M5S 1W3
Tel.: 416-924-7439

Cambrian Presbytery
310 Park Ave.
Thunder Bay, ON P7B 6C8
Tel.: 807-345-3916
campers@baynet.net

Centenary United Church
24 Main St. West
Hamilton, ON L8P 1H2
Tel.: 905-522-6843

Centenary-Queen Square United Church
215 Wentworth St.
Saint John, NB E2L 2T4
Tel.: 506-634-8288

First United Church
397 Kent St.
Ottawa, ON K2P 2B1
Tel.: 613-232-1016

First United Church
320 East Hastings St.
Vancouver, BC V6A 1P4
Tel.: 604-681-8365

First United Church
P.O. Box 940
Salmon Arm, BC V1E 4P1
Tel.: 250-832-3860

Glen Rhodes United Church
1470 Gerrard St. East
Toronto, ON M4L 2A3
Tel.: 416-465-3755

Kamloops United Church
421 St. Paul St.
Kamloops, BC V2C 2J7
Tel.: 250-372-3020

Metropolitan United Church
56 Queen St. East
Toronto, ON M5C 2Z3
Tel.: 416-363-0331

Rainbow Ministry, Winnipeg Presbytery
301-G Weston Street
Winnipeg, MB R3E 3H4
Tel.: 204-954-2900
rainbow@winnipegpresbytery.org

St. James United Church
4506 Sherwood Dr.
Regina, SK S4R 4B4
Tel.: 306-543-2626

L'Eglise unie St. Jean
110 E. rue Ste. Catherine
Montreal, QC H2X 1K7
Tel.: 514-866-0641

St. John's United Church
PO Box 698, Birch St.
Marathon, ON P0T 2E0
Tel.: 807-229-1031

St. Thomas-Wesley United Church
808-20th St. W.
Saskatoon, SK S7M 0Y3
Tel.: 306-244-7676

Southminster-Steinhauer United Church
10740-19 Ave.
Edmonton, AB T6J 6W9
Tel.: 780-435-2028

Sydenham Street United Church
82 Sydenham St.
Kingston, ON K7L 3H4
Tel.: 613-542-9616

Tatamagouche Centre
R.R.#3
Tatamagouche, NS B0K 1V0
Tel.: 1-800-218-2220
tatacent@tatacentre.ca

Trinity United Church
1805 Larch St.
Vancouver, BC V6K 3N9
Tel.: 604-736-2838

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GLOSSARY

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Affirm – Affirm United / The Affirming Ministries Program

Since 1982, this network has been working for full inclusion of all people in The United Church of Canada regardless of sexual orientation. Affirm promotes education and action, including rights, and civil recognition for same-sex couples.

Bisexual – a person whose sexual preference (erotic, emotional, and social attraction) may include a person of either sex. This sexual preference may or may not be acted upon.

Church Council – the governing body of those congregations with one single decision-making and administrative structure.

Conference – a regional level of administration within the United Church. A conference oversees the Presbyteries in its region.

Covenant – a formal and binding agreement. Within the church, the use of the word “covenant” implies that God is present and party to the agreement. Thus, in the Christian tradition, a covenant such as a marriage covenant, is a three-way relationship—between individuals and between those individuals and God.

Gay – a man who identifies that his primary sexual preference (erotic, emotional, and social attraction) is for a man. This sexual preference may or may not be acted upon. (The term “gay” is sometimes used for both gay men and lesbians.)

Gender – a social construct by which human beings are distinguished as either male or female. It refers to traits that are culturally and socially learned or imposed—the behavioural, social, and psychological traits associated with maleness and femaleness. See also **Sex**.

General Council – the highest court (decision-making body) of The United Church of Canada. Elected representatives from each conference meet as General Council every two to three years to set policy and program priorities and to act on other business of the church.

GLBT – a short form for “gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered.” This term is used to refer to sexual minorities in general—i.e. groups that have historically been subjected to discrimination or oppression in the church or society.

Heterosexual – a person whose primary erotic, emotional, and social preference is for a person of the opposite sex. This sexual preference may or may not be acted upon.

Homophobia – an irrational fear of or aversion to homosexual people.

Homosexual – a person whose primary sexual preference (erotic, emotional, and social attraction) is for a person of the same sex. This sexual preference may or may not be acted upon. See also **Gay** and **Lesbian**.

Lesbian – a woman who identifies that her primary sexual preference (primary erotic, emotional, and social attraction) is for a woman. This sexual preference may or may not be acted upon.

Official Board – the governing body of a congregation. It includes those responsible for both the spiritual (elders) and the material (stewards) and oversight of the congregation. The church Board may also be referred to as the church Council.

Petition – a formal request from any member of a United Church court (governing body) to that court, or a formal request from one court to another. If courts choose to transmit it, a petition on an important matter might move all the way from a local congregation to the highest church court, the General Council.

Presbytery – a local administrative court (decision-making structure) of the United Church, between the levels of the pastoral charges (local congregations) and the conference. Presbytery representatives are elected from their congregations.

Registered domestic partnership – a legally binding contract, freely entered into by two individuals who wish to formalize their relationship as a civil union, where they do not wish to marry, or are prohibited by law from marriage. Registered domestic partnerships have been used for several years in Europe as a way for gay and lesbian couples to obtain legal standing for their relationships. The term “gay marriage” is sometimes used, but these are not marriages and typically have less rights and/or obligations and are not portable outside of local jurisdictions.

Sex – a classification by which human beings are categorized as either male, female, or hermaphrodite (having characteristics of both males and females). The word “sex” refers to attributes and characteristics that are biologically and physically determined by the X and Y chromosomes. Most people have either XY (male) or XX (female) chromosome pairs. Some people have an extra X or Y chromosome. See also **Gender**.

Transgendered – a person whose gender identity differs from conventional expectations of masculinity or femininity. Gender identity is one’s internal sense of being male or female, and for most people, there is no conflict between gender identity and their physical sex. However, transgendered people grow up questioning their gender identity, which differs from their physical sex.