

Gays / Lesbians and the Church Questionnaire / Focus Group Survey

Background

Being inclusive means welcoming GLBT people at worship and in church activities. One congregation decided to survey members and non-members in order to better understand what would increase the feeling of welcome. The congregation's More Light committee used two techniques:

- Focus groups
Meetings at which participants could interact regarding the questions
- Written questionnaire

This document lists the results. The main point here is the technique, though, since your area may have different needs. We decided not to identify the congregation that conducted this survey for the same reason.

When you go to church, what do you expect / want? Why do you go?

- Pleasant atmosphere free of politics and causes, unlike < church name deleted >
- Simple sermon, popular hymns.
- Opportunities for service, single projects, single evening or half day.
- Spiritual nourishment, connection to greater church community. Grow, learn, serve, share.
- Uplifted, strengthened, challenged.
- Justice

What have you observed churches do to make gays and lesbians welcome?

- Openly, visibly, audibly, and sincerely welcoming.
- Congregation is active in educating the larger community.
- Joyful in their own freedom.
- Recognition as a family unit.
- More Light statement in the bulletin.
- Greeter at the door, "Ask me about More Light?"

What would you suggest churches do to make gays and lesbians more welcome?

- Encourage dialogue and openness
- I want our church to come out of the closet - take stands wherever and whenever they(we) can, be proactive.
- "Most of the time I feel we have 'our toe' sticking out of the closet".
- Make this a justice issue and see it and hear it in liturgy, word, and song.
- Community involvement. "Only after 'It' becomes a focused issue will 'It' cease to be an issue."
- Grass roots efforts to integrate G/L into the congregation and activities.
- If individuals in congregation are accepting, then the "institution" will be.

Gays / Lesbians and the Church Questionnaire / Focus Group Survey

- G/L members must also be accepting of one another.
- Make building open to G/L groups.
- Monthly “pot-luck” sponsored by More Light for gays, lesbians, and All.
- More “Minutes for Mission” from More Light.
- “There is really nothing a congregation can do to truly welcome gay people as long as the congregation affiliates with a denomination which systematically oppress us.”
- “A congregation really needs to be about the business of taking justice seriously and demanding that presbyteries and general assemblies cease policies of discrimination against gay people.”

Would any of the following church programs be of value to you?

- Yes Gay/Lesbian support group.
- Yes for coffee house or other social gathering - open to all?
- Yes for singing or other musical group.
- Mixed on Christian Meeting Group involving area churches. Suggestion for a study group or “circle” group - biblical?
- Mixed on G/L couples group.

What sorts of actions or activities might work to make you feel more integrated, involved and needed?

- Smaller service projects that can be scheduled in ½ day or single evening.
- This is a personal responsibility.
- “I want to be an ‘active’ member and a ‘gay active’ member at the same time.”
- What and how are ministries, committees, and organizations within the church doing, or will do, to implement our More Light policy and stance? Are they active supporters? What are nominating and personnel committees doing for gays and lesbians? Is it enough?
- Develop “sponsorship” program with intolerant people, answer questions.
- Find out skills and abilities and make connections, permission.

What have you observed churches do that did not make you feel welcome?

- Offered “help” to G/L who wish to change orientation.
- Over politicized the G/L element of the church.
- Too many G/L’s that did not accept fellow G/L’s.
- Created a negative/downward spiral in their support group.
- Closed, cold, abstract. “We need formal, visible, and audible ‘Welcome’”.
- Being asked to move, not sitting where you are “supposed” to sit.
- Discussions about fur storage and country clubs.

Gays / Lesbians and the Church Questionnaire / Focus Group Survey

What else would you like a church Community to know so that it could do a better job of meeting your needs?

- If the church community can focus on a quiet, sincere acceptance, then G/L will become fully integrated, productive members of the church.
- Follow through - call someone when their attendance tapers off - Why people disappear?
- Announce unions taking place, marriages.
- Ask people if they would like to be on the newsletter mailing list.
- Pass the peace.
- Church feels cold, use banners.
- By the very nature of being in/at < *church name deleted* >, we share much more in-common than differences - many of same values, morals, beliefs, likes, dislikes. We are not just our sexuality.
- We need the congregation to wear our “stoles” - to focus on more light living and to help us in our struggle for full recognition and acceptance.
- I want this at the church level, a specific stand, not just at the Presbytery level, which is general. I want < *church name deleted* > to stand and be counted.
- Being “More Light” is not a secret - We need to make it a focus, a priority,, a Beacon, not a candle - for the church, the community, the Presbytery, AND for Gays and Lesbians.