



**National Resource Center for
Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning**
at the Hunter College School of Social Work

Information Packet

LGBTQ Youth and Spirituality

By Noam Tidhar

April 4, 2009

**129 East 79th Street • New York, NY 10021
TEL 212/452-7053 • FAX 212/452-7475
www.nrcfcppp.org**

**A service of the
Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS**

LGBTQ Youth and Spirituality

The safety of youth is one of the core values of child welfare. In fact, the United States Department of Health and Human Service's Administration for Children and Families has published an online policy manual (2009) that can be considered the bible of, or primary source of guidance and information on, child welfare in the United States. Laws, regulations, and policies have been created based upon and drawing from this source. The canon of child welfare policies is based on three commandments: Permanency, Well-being, and first and foremost, Safety. It is from this standpoint that this information packet has been created in order to provide information and resources pertaining to the cross section of spirituality and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) youth.

The realities of LGBTQ youth experiences are troubling. Discrimination, anti-gay harassment, depression, fear, isolation, substance abuse, and even violence are commonplace experiences for LGBTQ youth (Gold & Drucker, 2008). In fact, in relation to heterosexual teens, LGBTQ teens show a much higher risk of suicidal ideation and actual suicide attempts (Cerel, Duberstein, Knox, Pena & Silenzio, 2007). These risks are exacerbated when combined with so called "reparative therapy" in which attempts by therapists or ministers are made to turn LGBTQ individuals into heterosexuals (Just the Facts Coalition, 2008). In addition, for LGBTQ children and youth, religious condemnation eliminates an important source of support and comfort (Brill & Pepper, 2008). These real dangers are exemplified in the autobiography, *Prayers for Bobby*, which tells the story of a religious mother who, following her gay son's suicide, reexamines her attempts to change him and the terms of her own faith (Aaron, 1996).

There is an abundance of discussion and debate surrounding LGBTQ individuals and religion. A search for the term, “gay religion” in the Google search engine yields fifteen million results. In addition, there is extensive research into scriptures and the way religious text actually interprets sexual orientation (Helminiak, 2000; Helminiak, 2006). There is also an array of autobiographies documenting the coming out process within a religious context (Chellew-Hodge, 2008; McGinley, 2006; Gold & Drucker, 2008). Even cinematic productions have depicted the debate and problems in the mergence of faith and homosexuality (Dubowski, 2001; Dubowski & Sharma, 2007; Karlake, 2007). The discussion is far from over, but it is noteworthy that there is now discussion where there was once silence.

Though it may seem like spirituality may be damaging to the well being of LGBTQ individuals, research has suggested that the opposite is true. In fact, a study conducted by Tan (2005) shows that there is a direct correlation between spiritual practice and a positive sense of well being amongst LGBTQ individuals. In addition, religion, faith and spirituality have proven to be helpful in the healing process and self-affirmation of LGBTQ people dealing with the homophobia of religious fundamentalism (Blando, 2009), substance abuse (Kus, 1992) and terminal illness (Miller, 2005).

Though slow, there seems to have been a shift towards greater acceptance of LGBTQ adults and youth within religious organizations. Bayly (2007) has published a guide geared towards creating a safe environment for LGBTQ youth within Catholic schools. Churches, pastors and congregations have also been encouraged by clergy and parents to promote an affirming place for the LGBTQ community (Hobbs, 2008; Saunders, 2004). Even LGBTQ- and queer-friendly congregations and religious

organizations are becoming ubiquitous (Johnston, 2004; Maher, 2006) [see website resource list in this packet], and many find their own way of positively reconciling spirituality and sexual identity (Smith & Home, 2007; Sullivan-Blum, 2004).

The experience of coming out or having a child who identifies as LGBTQ within the religious context is not a solitary one. Many queer youth and their parents have gone through the process only to emerge stronger and ready to inspire others (Cole, 2006; Curoe & Curoe, 2007; Karlake, 2007; Lawson, 2007; Marcolina & Grimaldi, 2006; Taylor, 2007). Practice wisdom shows that families should use their faith and values to support their LGBTQ children (Brill & Pepper, 2008). In the heart of all world faiths is the notion that we are never alone; for the safety of our children, it is important to affirm LGBTQ youth that they too are not alone and they are always in our hearts.

Bibliography

- Aarons, L. (1996). *Prayers for Bobby: A mother's coming to terms with the suicide of her gay son*. San Francisco: HarperOne.
- Administration for Children and Families. *Child welfare policy manual*. Retrieved March 26, 2009, from:
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/j2ee/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/policy.jsp
- Bayly, M. (2007). *Creating safe environments for LGBT student: A Catholic schools perspective*. New York: Routledge.
- Blando, J. A. (2009). Buddhist psychotherapy with older GLBT clients. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 5(1/2), 62-81.
- Brill, P. & Pepper, R. (2008). *The transgender child: A handbook for families and professionals*. San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press Inc.
- Cerel, J., Duberstein, P.R., Knox, K.L., Pena, J.B. & Silenzio, V.M.B. (2007). Sexual orientation and risk factors for suicidal ideation and suicide attempts among adolescents and young adults. *American Journal of Public Health*. 97(11), 2017-2019.
- Chellew-Hodge, C. (2008). *Bulletproof faith: A spiritual survival guide for gay and lesbian Christians*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cole, B. (2006). *Voices from the kingdom: All God's children have keys*. Kansas: Kimimi Publications.
- Curoe, C. & Curoe, R. (2007). *Are there closets in heaven? A Catholic father and lesbian daughter share their story*. Minneapolis: Syren Book Company.
- Dubowski, S.S. (Director). (2001). *Trembling Before G-d* [Motion Picture]. Israel:

Cinephil.

- Dubowski, S.S. (Producer) & Sharma, P. (Director). (2007). *A jihad for love* [Motion picture]. Halal Films.
- Gold, M. & Drucker, M. (2008). *Crisis: 40 stories revealing the personal, social and religious pain and trauma of growing up gay in America*. Greenleaf Book Group.
- Helminiak, D. A. (2000). *What the bible really says about homosexuality*. San Francisco: Alamo Square Distributors.
- Helminiak, D. A. (2006). *Sex and the Sacred: Gay identity and spiritual growth*. New York: Routledge.
- Hobbs, J. (2008, March 11). Climate of care. *Christian Century*, 125(5), 34-36.
- Johnston, L. B. (2004). A Gay and lesbian congregation seeks social justice for other marginalized communities. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 16(3/4), 193-206.
- Just the Facts Coalition. (2008). *Just the facts about sexual orientation and youth: A primer for principals, educators, and school personnel*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Retrieved April 4, 2009 from <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbc/publications/justthefacts.pdf>
- Karlsruhe, D. G. (Director). (2007). *For the bible tells me so* [Motion picture]. United States: Atticus Group.
- Kus, R. J. (1992). Spirituality in everyday life: Experiences of gay men of Alcoholics Anonymous. *Journal of Chemical Dependency Treatment*, 5(1), 49-66.
- Lawson, G. (2007). *Coming out coming alive*. Spiral River Productions.
- Maher, M. J. (2006). A voice in the wilderness: Gay and lesbian religious groups in the

- Western United States. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 51(4), 91-117.
- Marcolina, K. & Grimaldi, L. (Director). (2006). *Camp out* [Motion picture]. US: Liberation Entertainment.
- McGinley, D. (2006). *Acts of faith, acts of love: Gay catholic autobiographies as sacred texts*. Continuum International.
- Miller Jr. R. L. (2005). An appointment with god: AIDS, place and spirituality. *Journal of Sex Research*, 42(1), 35-45.
- Saunders, K. (2004, August). Mom, Dad, I'm gay. *U.S. Catholic*, 69(8), 18-23.
- Sullivan-Blum, C. R. (2004). Balancing acts: Drag queens, gender and faith. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 46(3/4), 195-209.
- Tan, P. P. (2005). The importance of spirituality among gay and lesbian individuals. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 49(2), 135-144.
- Taylor, J. (2007). *Waiting for the call: From preacher's daughter to lesbian mom*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Website Resources

LGBTQ Youth and Allies resources

http://www.alexsanchez.com/gay_teen_books.htm

A personal website with an extensive list of books related to LGBTQ teens.

<http://www.gayteens.org>

A website dedicated to gay teens around the world. The site provides news, resources, support, and discussion boards.

<http://www.glsen.org>

The website of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network that strives to make communities and especially schools a safe place for LGBTQ youth.

<http://www.outproud.org>

A website dedicated to gay teens in the U.S. The site provides news, resources, support and discussion boards.

<http://www.pflag.org>

The official website of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. The site provides news, resources, support and discussion for the LGBTQ community and their allies.

LGBTQ and Spirituality Resources

<http://faculty.shelton.cc.al.us/~dbell/religion2.htm>

An extensive bibliography from 1950 for LGBTQ persons about religion and spirituality.

<http://www.prideagenda.org/OurPrograms/PrideinthePulpit/LocateaCongregationinYourArea/tabid/106/Default.aspx>

New York State's Pride Agenda website which offers extensive lists of LGBTQ affirming and welcoming places of worship for all faiths.

<http://www.religioustolerance.org/homosexu.htm>

Website created by a multi-faith group, with an extensive discussion of world religions and the way they view homosexuality.

<http://www.hrc.org/issues/religion.asp>

The Human Rights Campaign is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender equality. This section of the Human Rights Campaign website focuses on "Religion & Faith". The Human Rights Campaign Religion and Faith Program mobilizes people of faith to advocate for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

LGBTQ Resources by Faith

Baha'i

<http://gaybahai.homestead.com>

Buddhism

<http://www.gaybuddhist.org/>

http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_budd.htm

<http://www.religionfacts.com/homosexuality/buddhism.htm>

Christianity

<http://www.gaychurch.org/>

http://www.gaychurch.org/Find_a_Church/united_states/us_new_york.htm

Hinduism

<http://www.religionfacts.com/homosexuality/hinduism.htm>

Islam

<http://www.al-fatiha.org/index.htm>

<http://www.religionfacts.com/homosexuality/islam.htm>

Judaism

<http://cbst.org/index.shtml>

<http://www.glbtejews.org/>

Sikhism

<http://www.sarbat.net/private/index.html>