

# ***Faith In Our Families***

Parents, Families and  
Friends Talk About Religion  
and Homosexuality





Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is the nation's foremost family-based organization committed to the civil rights of gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgender persons. Founded in 1973 by mothers and fathers, PFLAG has 200,000 members and supporters in more than 500 chapters throughout the United States. This vast grassroots network is cultivated, resourced and serviced by the PFLAG national office (located in Washington, D.C.), the national Board of Directors and our Regional Directors. PFLAG is a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization that is not affiliated with any political or religious institution.

For more information, please visit [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org).

### Our Vision

We, the parents, families and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, celebrate diversity and envision a society that embraces everyone, including those of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Only with respect, dignity and equality for all will we reach our full potential as human beings, individually and collectively. PFLAG welcomes the participation and support of all who share in, and hope to realize this vision.

### Our Mission

PFLAG promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, their families and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.

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## **We would like to thank the following PFLAG members for sharing their stories for this publication:**

- Carole Benowitz, Delray Beach, FL
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- Carolyn Golojuch, Makakilo, HI
- Barbara Hansen, Sandpoint, ID
- Mitzi Henderson, Menlo Park, CA
- Laurie James, Alexandria, VA
- Rita Kissen, Portland, ME
- Rhea Murray, Seymour, IN
- Matt Nevels, Chattanooga, TN
- Judith Ulseth, Webster, MN
- Millie & Gary Watts, Salt Lake City, UT
- Carolyn Wagner, Fayetteville, AR
- Sy Zivan, Pittsford, NY

## 1. Introduction

Discovering that a family member or friend is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (GLBT) can pose new questions about your faith and may prompt you to re-evaluate beliefs that you previously took for granted. If a family member or friend has come out, you may wonder if this discovery will influence your religious beliefs or your relationship with your faith community.

You probably have many questions: How will this knowledge affect your faith? How will other members of your family or community react to your GLBT loved one? What does this mean for your day-to-day religious life? How will this information affect the religious beliefs of your family? How will your religious traditions — weddings, births and coming-of-age ceremonies — be affected?

If you have found yourself asking these or other questions, read on. The following pages highlight the stories of members of **Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)** who have faced similar questions and concerns.

This new journey may be difficult at first as many people have been taught to not question their faith tradition. It is OK to ask questions both about your loved one's sexual orientation as well as your faith community. PFLAG encourages you to explore different interpretations of scripture. Widely respected biblical scholars disagree about the interpretations of the scriptures. Passages about homosexuality are no exception.

Many PFLAG members have found that our three-part mission of support, education and advocacy provides a map for reflection and action. Many approach the issue of religion and homosexuality by analyzing religious texts. They seek to find answers in the Bible, Koran, Torah and elsewhere. There are, however, many interpretations of any text. This publication does not provide textual interpretation. Rather, we offer personal experiences that show how people from a variety of faiths have come to terms with a loved one's sexual orientation.

Hearing stories of how others have dealt with issues similar to your own may help you strengthen your relationship with GLBT loved ones in your life. This is only the beginning of your journey. PFLAG can connect you with other people and families that have faced and tackled issues similar to your own.

## 2. Discovery

The realization that a friend or family member is GLBT can initially evoke a wide array of reactions. One father, Sy Zivan, remembers:

*“Our guidepost has always been unconditional love for our kids. We were observant Jews — conservative — not orthodox, not Reform. We were aware that there were lines in the Old Testament that prohibited gay relationships. Back when my daughter came out to us, the conserva-*

*tive seminaries held homosexuality as taboo. However, we didn't have a problem reconciling these views because our kids always come first."*

Paul Feiertag had a distinctly different reaction:

*"When our son Tim came out to us, I judged him to be 'involved with sin.' I wanted to get him 'fixed.' When we told Tim's brother, he just hung up the phone. Only my mother said, 'That's wonderful, isn't it?'"*

There are people who may say that your GLBT family member or friend can change. Many PFLAG families have found themselves wishing the same thing. When faced with this issue, Mitzi Henderson and her family decided:

*"Rather than allow stereotypes to interfere with our love for our children, we have chosen to seek out accurate information. Rather than try to change our children, we have chosen to change our attitudes."*

Some families find themselves in what appears to be an untenable situation — they love their GLBT family member or friend, but their religion teaches that their loved one is sinful. Sometimes they may even be told to avoid contact with their friend or family member. Acting out of concern and moral belief, some people may try to make their loved one change. If you find yourself in such a situation, remember:

- Many religious groups have wrestled with homosexuality, gender identity and religion and decided to be more welcoming to GLBT people.
- Within most faiths there are many interpretations of religious texts such as the Bible and the Koran on all issues, including homosexuality.
- While every religion has different teachings, almost all religions advocate love and compassion, and emphasize the importance of the family structure.
- Your family member or friend has come to you out of trust and love. Even if you discovered this information in another way, remember your family member or friend is the same person that you have always loved.
- Therapy designed to “change” GLBT people is destructive and often causes long term negative effects. (See page 15 for more on this issue.)

It may feel as if you and your family are alone in this struggle, but others have been in similar positions. Your local PFLAG chapter can be a source of support during this time.

### **3. Exploration**

You have decided to examine your faith and your feelings for a GLBT loved one. During this process of self-exploration, you may want to focus on two questions:

- What has my faith taught me to believe about GLBT people?
- What has my faith taught me about love and acceptance?

Questioning and exploration can be difficult. A strong support system can often be helpful, such as friends or family who can listen without judgment as you discuss new information.

Many people also choose to turn to another part of their traditional support system: clergy and other faith leaders. Depending on your faith community's teaching and leadership, however, this "natural" ally may or may not be in a position to help. Many religious denominations are studying their positions on human sexuality. Other religions or denominations have historically been unsupportive. You may first want to explore the attitudes about GLBT people in your faith community.

A mother of a gay son, Rhea Murray, who did not get positive support from her religious leader, cautions:

*"I would give this advice: Try to learn your religious leader's position on gay issues before revealing your own situation. If possible, speak to the religious leader, but have a fall back if all does not go well."*

## **Gathering Information**

What information might you want to seek? Here are some common questions:

- What is my religion's (or faith tradition's) teaching about homosexuality?
- What is my religion's position on acceptance of GLBT people? Does my religion consider homosexuality to be a sin?
- If so, how do others reconcile my religion's teachings regarding homosexuality with knowledge about themselves or their loved ones? Are other interpretations accepted?
- If homosexuality is not considered a sin, what place do GLBT people and/or their family members or friends have in my religion?
- Does my religion provide positive support for GLBT people and/or their family members or friends? If yes, what kind of support is offered? If no, where can GLBT people, and/or their family members or friends find support?
- Are there various views about homosexuality within my faith community?
- What are the personal views of my religious leader on this topic?
- Is my faith tradition more concerned about love and acceptance than about sexual orientation?

Simply asking questions and exploring possibilities are important first steps

for many. But this process can be both long and difficult, and you might find more questions than answers.

Kelly Kirby found:

*“When my wife and I left the fundamentalist Christian church, I found that my belief system was pulled out from under me. With help from caring people, I tried not to panic, and accepted that this process would take time. I put all of my beliefs on a shelf and took them down one at a time. I learned it was OK not to have all of the answers.”*

Living without definite answers can be a scary experience. If you are from a tradition that promises answers to your questions, you may find yourself doubting answers that previously seemed concrete. You may feel as if different forces in your life are pulling you apart. For some, an intense search of inner beliefs and a call for spiritual help can provide guidance. Laurie James remembers:

*“I had many conservative friends who were wonderful, generous people, but whom I felt had a huge blind spot when it came to gay people. This came to a crisis for me when my brother came out. I became emotionally agonized by the conflict between the people I respected and loved on the conservative side, and the people I respected and loved who were gay. For the first time I found myself asking God to help me reconcile these things and to help me seek the truth. I believe that God answered my request. I found a local church, and told the minister I needed to find a place with people who can help me seek God, and who would accept all of my family as they are. With the help of that minister, I joined the church, and our congregation has begun a journey to becoming open and affirming of gay people.”*

In addition to coming to terms with the sexual orientation of a family member or friend, you may find yourself faced with new challenges if your loved one is a younger person.

As younger people identify themselves as GLBT, how do friends offer these youth support and guidance? How do parents continue to raise their children with strong religious values in faith communities that may not address these issues?

Rhea Murray was aware of needing more guidance than was available:

*“My husband and I felt like we were tap dancing through a minefield of confusion during our gay son’s teen years. We had no one to turn to when we had perplexing situations arise in our family dynamics because of having a young gay child. How can I encourage my son to be honest, yet agree that at times, for his safety, he might not want to be out? Where can we find strong, positive gay role models in our small*

*community? Even seemingly simple situations — sleepovers, proms, dates to the movies — can bring up new issues. Families need support in knowing the best ways of parenting gay children, so they will become healthy, well-rounded, spiritual gay adults.”*

Another mother, Carolyn Wagner, struggled to find an answer for her teenage son after a particularly painful incident:

*“One set of parents denied their son’s continued friendship with Willy due to religious reasons. This was one of our son’s hardest moments — he was truly hurt.”*

Not only did Rhea Murray feel like she had no outside source of support, she also struggled with the attitudes of her church members toward her son:

*“Bruce grew up in a church that said, ‘love your neighbor and love your enemy.’ But instead of being overwhelmed by their love, he was overwhelmed by their judgment. It has just about destroyed his faith. I let him vent his feelings of being wounded and I encouraged his spirituality.”*

#### **4. Choices We’ve Made**

Many people find that the process of learning more about their religion’s position on homosexuality is rewarding. It can bring about a deeper commitment to their congregation and to their family. Others may be faced with difficult choices. If your religion is not accepting of your GLBT family member or friend, can you comfortably stay? Can you consider leaving? What are your choices?

While each person’s experience is unique, there are some choices that recur as people are faced with decisions about homosexuality and religion. We identify five options:

**Keeping your belief:** Staying within your religious tradition and staying at the current place of worship.

**Encouraging change:** Staying within the religious tradition, staying at the current place of worship, but working to make the religion and/or congregation more welcoming for GLBT people.

**Changing congregations:** Staying within the religious tradition, but finding a more welcoming congregation.

**Investigating other denominations:** Exploring a new congregation that is more welcoming for GLBT people and their family members or friends.

**Finding faith on your own:** Leaving any formal affiliation without adopting a new faith.

Now, let’s examine each of these options.



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## Keeping Your Belief

Sometimes pleasant surprises occur, such as when an expected conflict does not arise. Other times, people determine that living with conflict is the easiest or most practical solution.

For some people, changing religions or faith communities are not viable options, even though they may still find themselves wrestling with questions, such as how to deal with the disapproval of a faith leader or community.

If you still have concerns and cannot reconcile your religious beliefs with your newfound knowledge, that's OK. Allow yourself time to live without concrete answers. This period of exploration and reflection can be an important part of your journey.

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## Encouraging Change

Rather than leaving, many people seek to create a space within their congregation that is welcoming of GLBT people. Though this journey can be very rewarding, it can also be very difficult to become an advocate within a religious organization.

Mitzi Henderson, a former Sunday school teacher, describes her experience:

*“The year our son told us he was gay was the same year the Presbyterian Church adopted an official statement saying homosexuality was not God’s will, and that gay people could not be ordained. This threw my husband and me ‘into the closet’ in the church, and we were forced to look at our son and his life, but this process both challenged us and reinforced our faith.*

*Our own child was a perfect example of an upright devoted Christian, whose ethical standards we thought were of the highest order. So our journey became a journey to recognition — that what it meant to be gay for our son was very different than the picture our church had. It became part of our calling to attempt to start this discussion in the church. We’ve spent the last 20 years engaged in that dialogue, both locally and nationally.”*

Barbara Hansen feels she has a special role to play within her Catholic church:

*“I’m the only person in my church who says the word ‘homosexuality.’ Even if he wanted, my priest cannot take a stand — but I can. Because of my history with the church, I have credibility and I try to use it. I have talked to the education committee, and placed PFLAG announcements in the parish bulletin. I’ve been able to raise awareness by working within the church.”*

## Changing Congregations

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Every congregation is different. Each pastor, minister, rabbi, priest or other religious leader has a distinct style, and communities are full of unique personalities and beliefs. If you are uncomfortable with attitudes toward GLBT people within your congregation, you might consider finding another nearby congregation where you will feel more comfortable.

Sometimes even religious leaders who feel strongly about GLBT issues need to seek out more welcoming congregations, as Howard Bess, an American Baptist minister, found:

*“At my church in Anchorage, some people were not comfortable with my involvement in the gay rights movement. Worried that the issue was going to split the church, I eventually resigned. My activism made it very difficult to find another placement, so I took early retirement and moved. I found a small congregation that shared my convictions and was in need of a pastor.”*

Although many religions have welcoming congregations or supportive subgroups, you may be unable to find a supportive environment that is also convenient. Faced with this dilemma, some people choose to create that environment in their home communities.

You may also find that the energy spent raising awareness within a religious organization is better spent elsewhere, as Carole Benowitz notes:

*“I would never join a synagogue where the rabbi was homophobic. My whole life doesn't have to be a battle.”*

In recent years, many religious bodies have developed ministries with GLBT persons. In the Jewish tradition, many Reform and some Conservative synagogues now welcome gays, and many predominately gay synagogues have been formed, most of which welcome heterosexuals into their congregation.

Among Catholics, more than 40 bishops have now authorized special ministries to GLBT people within their dioceses. While these ministries are a sign of progress, they still teach that homosexual behavior is a sin.

Several Protestant denominations are involved in the Welcoming Congregation Movement. Through it, a congregation will study homosexuality in the light of their tradition for a year or more. When ready, the congregation or the board will vote to declare publicly that gays and lesbians are welcome and encouraged to participate in all aspects of the congregation's life. Welcoming Congregations are identified by different names in various denominations. For other denominations, such as the Friends (Quaker), Unity and Unitarian-Universalists, homosexuality has never been a barrier.

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## Investigating Other Denominations

You may find that you are unable to find support within your religion. Leaving a congregation — that has been a longtime spiritual home and refuge — can be a painful, difficult decision.

But ultimately a new congregation may offer a more comfortable place to worship. Rhea Murray left her Presbyterian church in rural Indiana after facing negative reactions from the congregation and minister.

*“I heard homophobic remarks in church, from both members and the pulpit. The minister told my family that the congregation, including him, was afraid of us. When a church member came up to me, ignored my son standing next to me, and asked with pity if I was OK, I knew it was my last day in that church. For a while, the local wildlife refuge became my sanctuary, and then I heard about a small, welcoming Episcopal church. The new church’s members continue to surprise me — even offering space on their bulletin board for my PFLAG literature.”*

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## Finding Faith on Your Own

It can be difficult, for social and spiritual reasons, to leave your religious faith for another one. And leaving organized religion altogether can also be daunting. Some people, however, feel that their objections are stronger than their historical or emotional ties to a particular faith group.

One mother, Carolyn Golojuch, found that despite years of dedication, she no longer had a home in the Catholic Church.

*“I was raised Catholic, went to Catholic school, taught CCD (Confraternity of Catholic Doctrine) and adult religious education. I was questioning some of the church’s teachings, but the stance on homosexuality was the last nail in the coffin. If the church does not have a place for my son, it does not have a place for me.”*

Judith Ulseth eventually left her congregation over its attitudes toward homosexuality, and did not join another.

*“I would work with the church if it was important to me, but I guess it’s not important. I leave that to others. I am a Christian and I have a personal relationship with God. I do a lot of public speaking, and I will tell my story, but the focus of my efforts is not the church.”*

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## Other Choices

If you find that none of these choices is right for you, remember that there are as many choices as there are people. An intense search of your own beliefs,

discussions with your religious leader, family members and friends, and an examination of the available alternatives, can be the first steps on your journey.

## **5. Educating Others**

Making a decision to stay or leave a community of faith or your religion need not be the end of your spiritual journey. For all of us, the continuing journey is constantly evolving. You may find yourself confronted with new issues and opportunities to explore your faith and the decisions you have made.

As you become more open about your GLBT family member or friend, you may find that some in your faith community turn to you for support. Your faith leader may come to you and ask you questions about GLBT issues. Many welcome these opportunities to enlighten or educate others.

Carole Benowitz remembers:

*“A few years ago I brought up a resolution for equality for gays and lesbians at the national convention of Women’s League for Conservative Judaism. For the rest of the convention, women were coming up to me and whispering, ‘I have a child who is...’ They couldn’t even say the word. They just desperately wanted someone to talk to.”*

For some, these informal discussions eventually develop into a more formal activism for change within a religious organization.

Mitzi Henderson is one such person:

*“I first spoke publicly about my gay son in a speech about our life to my congregation. My voice shook terribly. Half of the people applauded, half sat on their hands. Since that first experience my husband and I have continued to be involved — even on a national level. I have testified before the general assembly council and met with pastors across the country.”*

Millie and Gary Watts, lifelong Mormons, stopped regular participation in their church when their gay son was excommunicated, but felt they could be of help to other Mormons in similar situations.

*“When we talked to our son, we asked what we could do to help. He said, ‘Tell my story. Don’t let this happen to anyone else.’ At that point we became activists, trying to educate people — good people who just don’t understand. We co-chaired a group for Mormon parents of gay children, called Family Fellowship, and have worked to keep Mormon families together. People who know us well, and know our son, are now rethinking homosexuality.”*

It is almost impossible, however, to publicly support the welcoming of GLBT people into organized religion without coming across people with alternate or opposing views.

While it is difficult to face someone who tells you that your GLBT family member or friend is a “sinner” or “immoral,” it is key to remember your own beliefs about the treatment of others. While educating others is important, you will not always come to agreement with others.

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## **Facing Opposition**

Gene Floyd considered all of her options and after a period of deliberation, she came to a conclusion:

*“I took my time to reflect and think about my beliefs. I knew my son - he is thoughtful and good. I also knew that gays and lesbians were demonized in my faith and there was no way I was going to let anyone demonize my son. I have searched and studied and prayed about this, and I knew even before I got into the scholarly theology that I would not turn away from my son. I look at this through the eyes of the Bible, which says to love one another. I’m not going to get into battling verse with verse.”*

Matt Nevels, a Southern Baptist minister, acknowledges that:

*“My wife Frances and I both had to come to the point where we realized that people would not agree with our stand — our openness. They would not understand why we were doing what we are doing. That’s their problem. They have to deal with what they think and what they believe. We are dealing with what we believe. If what we do is a problem with somebody else then it becomes their problem. We know that God loves our son the way he created him. We have peace with God.”*

Searching for your own answers — and feeling secure with the decisions reached — may be the best strategy for dealing with people with differing viewpoints. Remember, no one can argue with your heart.

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## **6. The Journey Continues**

Organized religion inevitably involves special faith ceremonies. You may suddenly have to confront religious issues for which you are unprepared. For example, how do you deal with marriages or commitment ceremonies between GLBT people? What if the faith of your friend or family member’s partner is different from your own?

Weddings, christenings and other naming ceremonies, funerals, commitment ceremonies, may all provide new questions needing new answers.

Sy Zivan discovered:

*“We had concerns about our daughter Debbie’s faith — we still do. She’s Jewish and her partner Mary, the birth mother of their twins, is Catholic. Mary doesn’t care what religion their children are raised, so long as God is not mentioned. My wife and I have the concerns of other Jewish parents. We’d like all of our grandkids to be raised Jewish.”*

Commitment ceremonies and issues concerning children are just a few of the many religious rituals and situations that can become more complicated for GLBT people and their family members and friends. While these circumstances may require increased creativity on the parts of all involved, they can also bring unexpected joy as new traditions are created. For instance, although many people believe families would be uncomfortable with their GLBT loved ones having children, Kim Campbell found otherwise:

*“Both families — including the grandparents — flew to California for the birth of my gay brother-in-law’s son, and spent an extended amount of time together. At a family celebration the child was formally named, christened in his father’s African Methodist Episcopal faith and welcomed in his mother’s Yoruba religion. Without knowing the circumstances surrounding the birth of the baby, the high priest prophesied that one of little Khari’s key roles in life would be to bring families together!”*

Rita Kissen celebrated her daughter’s wedding:

*“My daughter, Michelle, and her partner had a beautiful, traditional Jewish wedding with Huppah (wedding canopy), breaking of the glass, and a Ketubah (wedding contract) signed by all four parents. My parents were proudly at the wedding. The fact that it was a very traditional Jewish wedding ceremony meant that the more resistant older generation was more comfortable — because it was something they were familiar with. I’m pleased that Michelle and her partner are Jewish, that they live a Jewish life and are conscious of themselves as Jews.”*

## **7. Where Do We Go from Here?**

This publication simply offers suggestions for the first steps on what can be an exciting endeavor. As you encounter twists and turns in your path, you can hopefully return to this resource on your journey to reconciliation, understanding and peace.

Following in the spirit of PFLAG's three-part mission of support, education and advocacy, there are many ways that you can acquire the guidance to help you through this journey, and ways you can reach out to others who undertake a journey of their own.

Even if you still have unanswered questions, you can help other families simply by sharing your experiences. By joining PFLAG or a supportive discussion group in your faith community, you can provide and receive support. By speaking out in faith communities about your journey, your experience can be a powerful catalyst for opening potentially difficult discussions about homosexuality and religion.

If you feel very strongly that your faith community or religious organization needs to improve its understanding of GLBT people, you can encourage your community to be more inclusive and sensitive. Many PFLAG members have found that joining interfaith alliances and facilitating new discussions about these issues can be fulfilling ways of sharing their experiences for positive change.

We have offered suggestions which may be helpful throughout your long but exciting journey in faith — faith in your loved ones and the faith of your religious convictions.

From time to time, as your journey progresses, we encourage you to read these stories again. We promise that upon each reading, different voices with new insights will emerge to join you on your journey.

## Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

The best way for parents, family members, friends of GLBT people to get support, receive educational materials and learn about PFLAG's advocacy efforts is to visit a chapter. PFLAG has more than 500 chapters located in all 50 states.

We suggest you call the local chapter whose name is stamped on the back of this booklet. If there is no chapter listed, you can visit PFLAG on the web, call PFLAG's national office for a referral, or you can use directory assistance to find PFLAG in your local area.

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## Welcoming Religious and Spiritual Groups

Below are just a few of the religious and spiritual groups that have formed to reach out to GLBT individuals and their families who want to be part of a welcoming faith community.

### **Affirmation (Mormon)**

[www.affirmation.org](http://www.affirmation.org)

### **Affirmation (United Methodist)**

[www.umaffirm.org](http://www.umaffirm.org)

### **The Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists**

[www.wabaptists.org](http://www.wabaptists.org)

### **Al-Fatiha**

[www.al-fatiha.net](http://www.al-fatiha.net)

### **Axios – Eastern & Orthodox Gay and Lesbian Christians**

[www.eskimo.com/~nickz/axios.html](http://www.eskimo.com/~nickz/axios.html)

### **Brethren/Mennonite Council for Lesbian & Gay Concerns**

[www.bmclgbt.org](http://www.bmclgbt.org)

### **Cathedral of Hope**

[www.cathedralofhope.com](http://www.cathedralofhope.com)

### **Conference for Catholic Lesbians**

[www.catholicslesbians.org](http://www.catholicslesbians.org)



**Dignity/USA (Catholic)**

[www.dignityusa.org](http://www.dignityusa.org)

**Evangelicals Concerned**

[www.ecwr.org](http://www.ecwr.org)

**Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns (Quakers)**

[www.flgbtqc.quaker.org](http://www.flgbtqc.quaker.org)

**Gay, Lesbian and Affirming Disciples Alliance (Disciples of Christ)**

[www.gladalliance.org](http://www.gladalliance.org)

**Heartstrong**

[www.heartstrong.org](http://www.heartstrong.org)

**Integrity, Inc. (Episcopal)**

[www.integrityusa.org](http://www.integrityusa.org)

**Lutherans Concerned**

[www.lcna.org](http://www.lcna.org)

**More Light Presbyterians**

[www.mlp.org](http://www.mlp.org)

**Seventh Day Adventist Kinship**

[www.sdakinship.org](http://www.sdakinship.org)

**Soulforce**

[www.soulforce.org](http://www.soulforce.org)

**Unitarian Universalist Office of  
Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns**

[www.uua.org/obgltc](http://www.uua.org/obgltc)

**United Church of Christ Coalition for LGBT Concerns**

[www.uccoalition.org](http://www.uccoalition.org)

**World Congress of GLBT Jewish Organizations**

[www.glbtjews.org](http://www.glbtjews.org)

### **Warning: “Ex-Gay” Ministries and “Reparative Therapy”**

Because homosexuality is not “chosen,” you cannot “change your child’s mind” if he or she is GLBT, in spite of what so-called “reparative therapists” and “ex-gay ministries” claim. In fact, these practices have been rejected by every major medical and professional association and have been proven to cause serious damage and even lead to suicide. A number of these organizations work with faith communities and through churches to spread their message and advocate

their position. It is critical that you are aware of the dangers in these practices and recognize the groups for what they are.

Here are a few points to know:

- In 1990, the American Psychological Association stated that scientific evidence shows that reparative therapy does not work and that it can do more harm than good.
- In 1997, the American Psychological Association again publicly cautioned against so-called “reparative therapy,” also known as conversion therapy.
- In 1998, the American Psychiatric Association stated it was opposed to reparative therapy, stating “psychiatric literature strongly demonstrates that treatment attempts to change sexual orientation are ineffective. However, the potential risks are great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive [suicidal] behavior...”
- The American Medical Association, states in its policy number H-160.991, that it “opposes, the use of ‘reparative’ or ‘conversion’ therapy that is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based upon the a priori assumption that the patient should change his/her homosexual orientation.”
- In 2001, The US Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior asserted that homosexuality is not “a reversible lifestyle choice.”

Many PFLAG parents have seen firsthand how damaging this so-called “reparative therapy” has been to their children. PFLAG members believe that it is important that we recognize and educate society based on scientific facts and reputable professional opinions, not on the ideological and pseudo-scientific beliefs expressed by ex-gay ministries and advocates of reparative therapy.

A few of the organizations who promote these practices include:

American Center for Law and Justice

American College of Pediatricians

American Family Association

Christian Communication Network

Christian Families with Faith for Lesbians and Gays (CFLAG)

Concerned Women for America

Courage/Encourage

Eagle Forum

Family Research Institute

Focus on the Family

Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality (JONAH)

Liberty Counsel

National Association for Research and Therapy for Homosexuality  
(NARTH)

Parents & Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays, (PFOX)

Positive Alternatives to Homosexuality (PATH)

Traditional Values Coalition

# Support PFLAG

## The Benefits of PFLAG membership:

- A subscription to our newsletter, the PFLAGpole
- The PFLAG Weekly Alert and Action Alerts via e-mail
- Discounts on PFLAG publications
- Invitations to local, regional and national events and conferences
- Voting privileges for national board members and regional directors
- Satisfaction that you are part of the nationwide network of PFLAG families and friends advocating for GLBT equality

To join as an at-large member, visit [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org) or fill in the application below and mail the application to:

### **PFLAG**

1726 M Street, NW, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20036

## Member Information:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

## Payment Information:

Check enclosed made payable to PFLAG.

Visa     Mastercard     Discover     American Express

Please charge my card:

\$50     \$75     \$100     \$250     \$500     \$1,000

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Card Expiration: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Important:*

*The member name and address must match what appears on your credit card billing statement to be processed.*

## Other PFLAG Publications

### **Our Daughters and Sons: Questions and Answers for Parents of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual People**

One of our most popular publications, this is a “must read” for parents who are forming new and honest relationships with a loved one who has come out to them. This booklet answers several commonly-asked questions about having a gay child and includes a list of related resources.

### **Nuestras Hijas y Nuestros Hijos: Preguntas y respuestas para padres de gays, lesbianas y bisexuales**

A culturally appropriate Spanish translation of *Our Daughters and Sons*, this booklet is a valuable resource for Spanish-speaking families coming to terms with homosexuality and bisexuality. It answers commonly asked questions about having a gay or lesbian loved one, and includes Spanish language resources.

### **Be Yourself: Questions and Answers for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth.**

Today’s youth face more social pressures than ever, especially since young people are coming out at increasingly younger ages. This publication offers a supportive approach to common questions asked by teens who may be questioning their sexual orientation. It also provides hotline numbers for teens and a list of resources.

### **Bisexuality Resource Packet**

Bisexuality is a commonly misunderstood and misrepresented concept. This packet provides facts about bisexuality, commonly-asked questions, resource lists and a set of articles.

### **From Our House to the Schoolhouse: A Safe Schools Publication**

Making schools safe for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth is an important part of PFLAG’s work. Facts about anti-gay harassment in schools and important legal landmarks are detailed in this booklet for educators. Resources and a “safe schools checklist” are also included.

*(continued)*

## Our Trans Children

PFLAG'S Transgender Network (TNET) published this booklet as an introduction to transgender (TG) issues especially for parents of "children" of all ages. The booklet covers transgender-related terms, TG youth, transition processes, family journeys, commonly asked questions, commonalities and differences between sexual orientation and gender identity, legal concerns, a brief bibliography, a list of resources, and trans family websites. This is an excellent educational tool for families, friends, employers, and the larger community. (This publication is also available in Spanish.)

## Coming Out Trans to Your Parents and Family

This single-page handout outlines things you need to consider when you plan to come out to your parents and family as transgender. It is a guide to making the coming out process as comfortable as possible.

**All publications are available as a free download on [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org) and also for purchase. Visit our website or call (202) 467-8180 for more information.**





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