

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.” -
Ephesians 2:10

How to Better Support LGBTQ+ Youth

We are best able to tell others about God’s work in our lives when we are grounded in our understanding of who we are and whose we are. As our young church members build their initial sense of self, these foundations will have lifelong implications to their overall quality of life.

Many LGBTQ+ youth are able to proclaim Christ’s saving actions in their lives with integrity and honesty. However, many are still afraid to speak from the fullness of their created being. [The Centers for Disease Control](#) and the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) provide best practices for the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth; they also provide insight into what environments enable depression, suicidal ideation, and self-harm.

As we look for ways to provide welcoming congregations for all ages, LGBTQ+ youth should not be an afterthought. Despite the immediacy of problems facing LGBTQ+ youth, it is sometimes difficult to change how a congregation sees the needs of its young people.

Here are five ways to begin changing your faith community to better support LGBTQ+ youth. Engaging these ideas within your congregation will not only help ensure the safety of the LGBTQ+ youth in your congregation, but help change our prevailing culture and create a safer environment for all youth.

1. Mental Health First Aid

The National Council for Behavioral Health offers [Mental Health First Aid](#), an invaluable resource for information and training opportunities. A church that commits to offering this training equips their own congregation and as well prepares the community to better support LGBTQ+ youth. The youth-specific training module takes a day and covers topics that will assist the congregation in helping all youth.

While doing this it also breaches the topic of how mental health issues, especially those brought about by negative environments, impact LGBTQ+ youth specifically. Any congregation, regardless of its political or theological culture, should be able to fully

embrace this resource.

2. Adult Education on Youth Homelessness and Foster Care

Our scriptures proclaim the work of those who follow Jesus is to “share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house” (Isaiah 58:7). In every community, the least of these are often the teens within our foster care system and those struggling with homelessness. An hour-long adult education program could be of interest to many members of your congregation. Look to the prophets and Gospels for inspiration and invite community leaders to speak.

The reality is that [40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+](#) and the numbers in foster care are also [disproportionate to the general population](#). Any honest conversation regarding youth homelessness and our foster care system is going to breach the disproportionate way LGBTQ+ youth face being part of these realities and prompt reflection within the worship community.

3. The Reformation Project

[The Reformation Project](#) is a “Bible-based, Christian grassroots” ministry dedicated to assisting congregations to become more inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community. Its founder, Matthew Vines is the author of [God and the Gay Christian](#), a book that seeks to fully value the Bible and LGBTQ+ individuals. The Reformation Project’s workshops and resources provide an amazing set of tools for any ministry working towards valuing LGBTQ+ individuals.

4. Actively Check Sources for their LGBTQ+ Stance

There are a lot of amazing and popular youth ministry resources to choose from. Unfortunately, many resources are not merely dismissive of LGBTQ+ concerns but dangerous to their well-being.

It is imperative for the well-being of the LGBTQ+ folk in your church that you review all resources for harmful bias. Problematic resources include: Zondervan Youth Bibles which are bright and engaging but have footnotes and inserts that have haunted LGBTQ+ individuals’ spiritual lives for decades; Eric Metaxas, an Episcopalian who writes bestselling

biographies of religious leaders but also actively promotes abusive “reparative therapy” for LGBTQ+ youth; Jordan Peterson, a Canadian professor with an engaging series of talks on the Bible while also being a strident opponent of LGBTQ+ human rights legislation. Young Life, Cru, Intervarsity, Navs, and similar groups host dynamic retreats and programming while maintaining theologies that fail to value LGBTQ+ youth and their capacity to be leaders of the church.

I regularly encounter Episcopal churches using these resources and promoting events involving them. Know the greater context of any resource being used by a congregation and ask if the resource’s treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals truly aligns with the expectation of the worship community.

5. LGBTQ+ Mentors and Consultants

It is essential that LGBTQ+ adults participate as part of the regularly review your youth ministry programming. This will move your ministry from being reactive and somewhat prepared if a youth comes out, to being proactive and offering a space where all youth are free to be who they are. Ask LGBTQ+ adults to review youth ministries guidelines, communication with parents, signage, and programming.

They might point out how dating behavior rules do not take LGBTQ+ relationships into account, or how programming expects a clear gender binary, or suggest an amazing LGBTQ+ inclusive resource that can take the place of a problematic one. Your reviewer may be a member or friend of the congregation, or perhaps from a local LGBTQ+ organization such as [PFLAG](#), or an LGBTQ+ Episcopal leader from another community; there are many of us more than willing to give of our time and talent to ensure the safety of LGBTQ+ youth.

Ben Garren is an Episcopal Priest and Chaplain to the University of Arizona. Amidst other things, before seminary, he could be found working in Middle School Special Education, Youth Homeless Shelters, and LGBTQ+ Political Campaigns. He wants to remind you to start preparing for the next Episcopal Youth Event.