



RELATIONAL GUIDE FOR

ALLIES

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Introduction

Allyship is not all rainbows and glitter.

To be sure, over the years I've collected my fair share of rainbow-themed paraphernalia, and the Glitter of Pride Past still haunts every nook and cranny of my home. That such delightful visuals have become icons of hope and joy which are synonymous with the LGBTQ+ community is nothing short of redemptive, revealing that the glory of God shines through every life lived fully and authentically. But remember: clear, sunny skies don't produce prismatic phenomena. Only storms give rise to rainbows.

I was 16 when my older sister Rosemary came out as a lesbian. Given that our parents raised us in a conservative Pentecostal church, they did not take the news well. I followed their lead, doing my best to love the sinner, hate the sin, and pray the gay away. But these tidy proverbs could only delay the inevitable reckoning for so long. Ten confusing years later, Rosemary was set to wed her longtime girlfriend Ginger—yes, they both have spice names—and I still didn't know how to RSVP, much less what to believe.

Enter Jesus, stage left.

Before I recount the supernatural encounter that changed my life and my theology, let me first acknowledge that not everyone undergoes ecstatic, charismatic experiences of the Divine. And to be clear, the absence or presence of such experiences in a person's life is in no way a statement on their spiritual maturity or level of intimacy with God. I share my moment with Jesus here not to set a standard, but to extend an invitation. My mentor David Gushee, in his book *Changing Our Mind*, puts it this way:

Breaking open a settled paradigm seems to take transformative encounters with God and people, empowered by the Holy Spirit. But not everyone has such encounters or is open to them. One reason we need to come out as LGBT or allies is so we can make such transformative encounters available to more of those who have not had them.¹

My transformative encounter took place one early June morning in 2014, a mere two months before my sister's long-dreaded nuptials. I was seated on my parents' back porch when, unbidden, a vision arrested my mind's eye. Scenes of Jesus at Rosemary's wedding scrolled across my imagination like a movie. First, there He was, strolling up to the guestbook pre-ceremony, much to the brides' bemusement; then,

1 Gushee, David. *Changing Our Mind*.

at the reception, beer in hand, laughing unabashedly with other attendees—attracting the attention of my sister, who had kept her distance from this apparent wedding crasher up until then. As a content atheist, Rosemary doesn't recognize Jesus; but in this vision, it's obvious even to her —He's the life of the party.

With tears streaming down my face, I watched the vision culminate in, of all things, an Instagram post. It was a selfie taken by Jesus with the brides, each with their arms wrapped around one other smiling up at the camera, captioned only by hashtags: #spicegirlswed—their real wedding hashtag!—#mygirls, #hersmile, #worthit. And suddenly I understood. As C.S. Lewis put it in *Till We Have Faces*,

I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice?

I RSVPed yes that day, not because I could reconcile the Biblical “clobber verses” on homosexuality—all of that would come later—but because I had seen Jesus in the last place I'd expected Him. For years I had thought of Rosemary's wedding as a graveyard, where all my hopes for her went to die. But I should have known better.

You see, Jesus has a history of inviting His disciples to pick up their crosses and follow Him—not to a cemetery, as they surely anticipated, but to a garden:

“At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a tomb, in which no one had ever been laid.” John 19:41, NIV

From a long way off, the road to Calvary always looks like a dead end, but it's only after the ultimate surrender that its true nature is revealed. That's the Gospel: death *precedes* life.

How fitting, then, that on August 16th, 2014, I followed my beloved Jesus into the Cator-Woolford Gardens where, yes, I laid to rest not only my old hopes for Rosemary and Ginger, but also my old ideas about God. And from that death came new life for our entire family. Because God is not an undertaker. God is a gardener.²

Allyship is more than rainbows and glitter—it's storms, too. Since Rosemary's wedding, I've had to weather squalls and tempests of a different nature. The church I worked for at the time threatened to fire me over affirming social media posts, and I survived only on a technicality. Years later, I was promptly

2 See Genesis 2:8 and John 20:11-18.



**God is not an
undertaker. God
is a gardener.**

dismissed from my position at another Christian ministry for refusing to sign a statement that violated my beliefs concerning LGBTQ+ equality. That's not to say that only risky, heroic stands count as allyship, but to paraphrase pastor Jonathan Williams, if you're not getting hit with the same rocks as the people for whom you advocate, are you really an ally?

In this guide, I'll unpack what the unglamorous, frequently uncomfortable work of allyship looks like in the different arenas of life. My goal is to gird you for the long haul of faithfulness to Jesus and to our LGBTQ+ loved ones. I write these words with all fear and trembling, knowing that I, especially as a white, cisgender, heterosexual woman, have so much still to learn too. Yet it's here, in this space of humility and vulnerability, that God's grace—just as bright and persistent as glitter—abounds. It's on me. And it's on you too.



LGBTQ+ Definitions

What does *gay* mean? Depends on who you ask and when you ask. Elementary-school-aged me would have pointed to lyrics from *West Side Story* and classic Christmas songs, and confidently said *gay* meant *happy*. Middle-school me would've joined the chorus of my peers saying it meant *uncool, shameful, stupid, unworthy*. And high-school me? Reckoning with Rosemary's recent coming-out, she would've shook her head in silent shame, embarrassed to have so flippantly used an actual human being's sexual orientation as a slur. Words can express, but they can oppress, too.

If reading that makes you cringe (as it does me!), then congratulations—you are sensitive to the dynamic, political nature of words. Keep that in mind as we review LGBTQ+ vocabulary. For some readers, this glossary section represents the first foray into the unknown world of LGBTQ+ allyship. For others, this former frontier has now become familiar ground. But all of us must remember to hold these terms lightly and use them humbly, ready at any moment to adjust in order to better love and serve the LGBTQ+ community. Language is deeply personal, so that means we must always defer each individual person's preferred terms. One size doesn't fit all.

Here, I've attempted to provide a beginner's overview of basic terminology as a starting point for deeper learning.

Gender

SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH

The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex based on a combination of anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes. It is important we don't simply use "sex" to describe people's identity, because gendered characteristics in humans occur along a spectrum and because of its role in transphobia (sex doesn't always equal gender).¹

GENDER IDENTITY

One's innermost concept of self as man, woman, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be aligned with or different from

1 Trans Student Educational Resources. "Definitions." <http://www.transstudent.org/>, n.d. <http://transstudent.org/gender/>

their so-called ‘sex’ assigned at birth.²

GENDER EXPANSIVENESS

1. **Transgender person:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the ‘sex’ they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.³ (Note: Transgender identity does not depend on medically transitioning through either hormone therapy or surgical interventions.)
 - **Trans man:** a person who was assigned female at birth but now embraces a male identity
 - **FTM:** acronym for female to male⁴
 - **Transmasculine/transmasc:** an adjective that can refer to a trans man, or an adjective that can describe a non-binary person’s masculine gender experience/expression
 - **Trans woman:** a person who was assigned male at birth but now embraces a female identity
 - **MTF:** acronym for male to female⁵
 - **Transfeminine/trans femme:** an adjective that can refer to a trans woman, or an adjective that can refer to a non-binary person’s feminine gender experience/expression
 - **AFAB/AMAB:** Acronyms meaning “assigned female/male at birth” (or DFAB/DMAB, “designated female/male at birth”). No one, whether cis or trans, gets to choose what sex they’re assigned at birth. At the time of publication, this term is preferred to “biological male/female”, “male/female bodied”, “natal male/female”, and “born male/female”, all of which may be defamatory and/or inaccurate.⁶
 - **Transition:** Altering one’s birth sex is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition includes some or all of the following personal, medical, and legal steps: telling one’s family, friends, and co-workers; using a different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one’s name and/or designated “sex” on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more types of surgery.

2 Human Rights Campaign. “Glossary of Terms.” HRC.org, n.d. Accessed July 2, 2020.

3 Ibid.

4 dictionary.com

5 dictionary.com

6 <https://standwithtrans.org/glossary-of-terms/>

The exact steps involved in transition vary from person to person. Some people will only complete some steps while others may complete more. Some who identify as trans may not transition. Please avoid the phrase “sex change.”⁷

2. **Cisgender person:** A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with the social and cultural expectations typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. The abbreviation cis may also be used. Cis-hetero or cishet refers to a straight cisgender person.
3. **Nonbinary person:** Someone whose gender identity blends elements of being a man or a woman, or a gender that is different than either male or female.⁸
 - **FTX:** A way to describe someone who is assigned female at birth and identifies as nonbinary/ genderqueer/ gender non-conforming/etc., and who may also be medically transitioning and/or presenting their gender in a way that is not in congruence with their assigned sex at birth. It is in the same family as the FTM and MTF labels, but provides nonbinary/ genderqueer/GNC/etc. folks space to identify themselves (and their transition) outside the aforementioned binary options.⁹
 - **MTX:** A way to describe someone who is assigned male at birth and identifies as nonbinary/ genderqueer/ gender non-conforming/etc., and who may also be medically transitioning and/or presenting their gender in a way that is not in congruence with their assigned sex at birth.¹⁰
 - **Agender:** Having no specific gender identity or having a gender identity that is neutral. Sometimes used interchangeably with gender neutral, genderless, or neutrois.¹¹
 - **Bigender:** Having two distinct gender identities or expressions, either simultaneously, at different times, or in different situations.¹²
 - **Genderfluid:** Moving between two or more gender identities or expressions.¹³
 - **Genderqueer:** A catch-all term for individuals with non-binary gender identities.¹⁴

7 <https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>

8 Definition from <https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive>

9 <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/lgbtq-definitions-gender-sexuality-terms>

10 Ibid.

11 Definition from <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-does-it-mean-to-be-non-binary-or-have-non-binary-gender-4172702#types-of-non-binary-gender>

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

4. Gender Expression: External presentation of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut, or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.¹⁵

- **Femme:** Feminine identified person of any gender/sex.¹⁶
- **Boi:** A person assigned female at birth who expresses or presents themselves in a culturally/ stereotypically masculine, particularly boyish way. Also, one who enjoys being perceived as a young man and intentionally identifies with being perceived as a “boy.”¹⁷
- **Masculine of Center:** A term originating within communities of color describing people whose gender identity or expression falls towards the masculine end of the gender spectrum; includes a wide range of terms such as butch, stud, aggressive/AG, dom, macha, tomboi, trans masculine, etc.¹⁸
- **Butch/Stud:** A person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. ‘Butch’ is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but it can also be claimed as an affirmative identity label.¹⁹

5. Intersex person: A person born with sex organs, genetic coding and/or secondary sex characteristics which are a blend of typically male and female physical traits (historically referred to as a hermaphrodite). “Intersex” refers to people who are born with any of a range of sex characteristics that may not fit a doctor’s notions of binary “male” or “female” bodies. Variations may appear in a person’s chromosomes, genitals, or internal organs such as testes or ovaries. Some intersex traits are identified at birth, while others may not be discovered until puberty or later in life.²⁰ An intersex person may or may not personally identify with their assigned gender. “The most thorough existing research finds intersex people to constitute an estimated 1.7% of the population.”²¹

Sexuality

1. Sexual Identity: This term is not widely used, but it refers to the socially influenced self-understanding/labeling²² of one’s self.

15 Human Rights Campaign. “Glossary of Terms.” HRC.org, n.d. Accessed July 2, 2020.

16 Definition from https://www.mvc.edu/files/Allies_Terminology.pdf

17 <https://lgbt.williams.edu/resources/terms/>

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 <https://interactadvocates.org/intersex-definitions/>

21 <https://www.intersexequality.com/how-common-is-intersex-in-humans/>

22 David G. Myers, *Psychology*, 10th Edition (New York: Worth Publishers, 2013)

2. Sexual Orientation: The presence or absence of an inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people.²³ There are several types of orientations:

- **Asexual:** describes a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction or desire for other people
- **Lesbian:** describes a woman or woman-aligned person who is emotionally, romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women.
- **Gay:** describes a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender OR a man/male-aligned person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other men
- **Bisexual:** describes a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree.
- **Pansexual:** describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree. Overlaps with bisexuality.
- **Demisexual:** describes a person who only experiences sexual attraction to people with whom a close emotional connection has been formed. Considered to be along the spectrum of asexuality.
- **Queer:** describes a person who is not straight and/or cisgender. The term began as a slur, but has been partially reclaimed and it used as a catch-all identifier by some in the LGBTQ+ community. Others find it offensive.²⁴ Note: Should only ever be used as an adjective, never as a noun.

Did you notice the terms were divided into two distinct categories? It's common for people to equate gender identity with sexual orientation, but they are not the same. Keep that in mind as we move through the guide. Remember: language is dynamic and politicized, as well as deeply personal. As various cultures keep evolving so too does language, rendering the above terms obsolete or even offensive. So don't take correction personally, instead embrace the opportunity to flex your curiosity and humility.

23 Human Rights Campaign. "Glossary of Terms." HRC.org, n.d. Accessed July 2, 2020.

24 Harman, B.T. "Relational Guide Parents of Newly Out LGBTQ+ People." Q Christian Fellowship, n.d. <https://www.qchristian.org/guides/parents>.



Non-Affirming, Affirming, and Ally— What is the Difference?

Ever wondered where the phrase “love the sinner, hate the sin” came from? Nope, not Jesus. Not Paul, either. It was Gandhi!¹ In his renowned work *The Story of My Experiments With the Truth*, the famed Hindu activist says,

Hate the sin and not the sinner is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practiced, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world.²

I can't fault anyone for thinking this platitude came from the Bible; after all, it may seem to some of us like something our beloved carpenter would say.

Take a moment and reflect on instances in which you've heard “love the sinner, hate the sin” deployed—what was the conversation about? Did the phrase signal the start or end of the discourse? Did the phrase clarify or obscure the path forward? What were the implications of its application?—and consider your experience in light of the phrase's origin and context.

When my sister Rosemary came out, I looked to my Christian friends for solace, support, and strategy. But time and again, those conversations would end in my exasperation with these well-meaning peers and pastors who inevitably retreated to the unassailable fortress of “love the sinner, hate the sin.” For at least a generation, this phrase has been the rallying cry for **non-affirming theology**, which holds that only cisgender identity and heterosexual activity between one man and one woman within the covenant of marriage is permissible, and therefore eligible for God's blessing.

Non-affirming theology commonly appears in two different ways:

1. The first “affirms the existence of LGBTQ+ identities, but adheres to a ‘traditional’ view of marriage and sex as designed for one man and one woman”.³ This version requires that LGBTQ+ persons remain celibate and is a conviction imposed upon others by cisgender, heterosexual persons.

1 Gandhi, Mahatma. *An Autobiography Or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. United Kingdom: Yale University Press, 2018. pp. 346

2 This idea of the division of love and hate did not originate with Gandhi (St. Augustine also exhorted nuns with the same general sentiment); however, the modern rendering of the phrase comes from Gandhi's autobiography.

3 QCF

Example: Tiffany's son Lionel just came out as gay. She tells him she accepts his identity, but urges celibacy as the only way to be acceptable to God as a gay Christian.

2. The second views LGBTQ+ identities themselves as aberrant, disordered, or in some other way illegitimate and therefore inherently outside God's approval and blessing. This view implicitly or explicitly supports efforts to alter someone's sexual orientation or gender identity through conversion therapy practices, and is sometimes referred to as **Side X** or **Ex-gay** ideology.

Example: Jane schedules a meeting with her pastor, Robert, to discuss her anxiety over reconciling her faith with her bisexuality. Robert counsels Jane to start attending the church's new support group for congregants desiring to change their orientations. He assures her she will be "free" from her wayward attractions.

Affirming theology maintains that the gender identities, sexual orientations, and sexual relationships of LGBTQ+ individuals are equally as good and holy in the sight of God as those of cisgender, heterosexual people. Proponents of this view extend an unqualified invitation to our LGBTQ+ siblings to participate fully in the life of the church, including weddings, membership, and leadership positions.

Members of the LGBTQ+ community may espouse different variations of affirming theology according to each individual's personal convictions. These can be broadly grouped into two categories, although individuals may hold convictions somewhere between these definitions:⁴

1. **Side A Theology:** Any theology which fully affirms both LGBTQ+ identity and same-gender sex. Side A theology fully affirms same-gender relationships, marriage and sex as good and acceptable to God. Side A theology also recognizes that celibacy may be freely chosen for many reasons, including by individuals who identify along the spectrum of asexuality. Individuals within this theological framework may hold a broad range of sexual ethics.

Example: Antonio, an Anglican priest, just celebrated his sixth wedding anniversary with his husband Jeff.

2. **Side B Theology:** Any theology which affirm LGBTQ+ identities, yet maintains that Christians should refrain from same-gender sex for a variety of personal and/or theological reasons. This includes single, celibate LGBTQ+ Christians as well as those in celibate partnerships and mixed-orientation marriages. These are marriages wherein at least one person is married to a person of a differing sexual identity, such as a heterosexual man married to a gay woman. *Important: Side B refers to a theological viewpoint reserved for LGBTQ+ persons only. When celibacy is imposed by cisgender,*

4 Language concerning Side A, Side B, and celibacy derived from <https://www.qchristian.org/faq>

heterosexual people onto others, it is referred to as non-affirming.

Example: After struggling with internalized shame about her sexual identity, Mia came out as a lesbian this year. In full acceptance of who God created her to be, Mia embraces celibacy as a faithful expression of her personal theological convictions.

YOU CAN'T BE AN ALLY TO THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY WITHOUT FIRST ADOPTING AN AFFIRMING THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK.

You can't be an ally to the LGBTQ+ community without first adopting an affirming theological framework that upholds LGBTQ people and their decisions around gender identity, sexual orientation and same-gender sex. However, allyship requires much more than internal acquiescence to a set of beliefs. An ally is someone who takes action for the protection and promotion of a marginalized or oppressed group; in this case, LGBTQ+ persons. If adopting affirming theology is talking the talk, then allyship is walking the walk. As you might imagine, this takes conscious effort and demands time, energy, and resources. In later sections of this guide, we will explore the specifics of LGBTQ+ advocacy, but for now, remember this:

Allies take action.



But What If I'm Not Ready To Become Affirming?

Let's hit pause for a second.

Perhaps you're feeling squirmy about all this—it's ok if you need to admit to yourself that you're not yet entirely on board. I understand, I truly do. If you're coming from a staunchly non-affirming religious background like I am, then chances are good that it feels like the integrity of your faith is at stake with this decision. At least that's how I felt. For years, I thought becoming affirming and wholeheartedly embracing my sister meant betraying God and abandoning the Bible. It was a heavy burden to bear.

It was also a false dichotomy. Friend, you do not have to choose between Jesus and your LGBTQ+ loved ones. Can you allow yourself just a moment to breathe in that peaceful relief? And you don't have to take it from us. There's an abundance of scholars, advocates, writers, and speakers who have produced quality material reconciling the fraught matters of faith and sexuality. Here's a curated selection for your exploration:

Walking the Bridgeless Canyon by Kathy Baldock¹

Transforming: The Bible and The Lives of Transgender Christians by Austin Hartke

Our Lives Matter by Pamela Lightsey

God and The Gay Christian by Matthew Vines²

Changing Our Mind by David Gushee

Radical Love by Patrick Cheng

Beyond Shame by Matthias Roberts

Torn by Justin Lee

Does Jesus Really Love Me? by Jeff Chu

God Believes in Love by Bishop Gene Robinson

Refocusing My Family by Amber Cantorna

Blue Babies Pink: A Southern Coming Out Story in 44 Episodes by B.T Harman (available as a blog at bluebabiespink.com or as a podcast on iTunes)

This I Know by Jim Dant

For specific resources tailored to parents and clergy, please see QCF's corresponding relational

1 Please see her website canyonwalkerconnections.com for videos and other resources.

2 Please visit reformationproject.org for more resources and guides on navigating this discussion.

guides at www.qchristian.org/guides/sexuality.

Doing this kind of research is work, yes, but trust me—it’s a lighter load than the alternative. And isn’t that what Jesus promised us?

*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. **Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;** for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30, NRSV (emphasis added)*

Finally, a gentle word of caution. For cisgender, heterosexual people like myself, opting out of affirming theology and allyship may seem like a benign exercise in “agreeing to disagree.” But is it harmless? When families fail to fully affirm and accept their LGBTQ+ kids, these youth are:

- 5.9x more likely to report high levels of depression
- 3.4x more likely to use illegal drugs
- 3.4x more likely to be at high risk of HIV and STIs
- 8.4x more likely to report having attempted suicide³

And the danger of death by suicide looms largest for transgender people. Research shows that family rejection and religious rejection each **double** a trans person’s average number of suicide attempts in a given year.⁴

These sobering statistics aren’t intended to shame anyone—I genuinely believe non-affirming Christians are doing their best to love God and their LGBTQ+ neighbors. I trust that your heart is as devoted to God as mine is, so rest assured that your faith is not in question. If you’re open to it—let’s be honest, **you have read this far**—begin imagining what it would be like to love people with total abandon, fully secure in the knowledge that God affirms *you*. Because, friend, the good news is you are so much freer to love than you think.



The good news is
you are so much
freer to love than
you think.

3 aforementioned statistics from https://www.glaad.org/conversiontherapy?response_type=embed

4 <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/suicidality-transgender-adults/>



What Do I Do When a Friend or Family Member Comes Out To Me?

My sister Rosemary never officially came out to me. By the time she flung a cursory “You know I’m gay, right?” in my general direction, context clues—notably her relationship with Ginger—had alerted me to the situation. Not that I blame her. At the time, I was not a safe person for her, as many bungled conversations in the following years would later confirm. So, in retrospect, I understand her reluctance to share.

And that brings me to an important point: no one owes you any sort of self-disclosure, least of all about their gender identity or sexual orientation. Suspicions on your part do not necessitate confessions on their part. When and if your LGBTQ+ loved one does come out to you, remember these key points:

- 1. *It is not about you.*** Keep the focus on the person with affirming statements (“Thank you for sharing your identity/experience” or “I am grateful to know you more fully.”) and reflective listening (“Would it be accurate to say you are feeling relieved/nervous/happy/worried/fulfilled?”).
- 2. *Be mindful of your body language.*** If it’s safe (e.g., you’re not driving, cooking, etc.), stop what you’re doing and physically draw near to the person. Keep arms uncrossed, maintain gentle eye contact, and nod as appropriate.
- 3. *Reassure them; don’t defend yourself.*** Your loved one may imply that they were worried about coming out to you, afraid of how you’d react. Or you may wonder why they didn’t tell you sooner. In any case, resist the urge to turn the conversation into a courtroom cross-examination defending your trustworthiness. It’s not about that. Instead, if the LGBTQ+ person expresses anxiety, use reflective listening to make them feel heard in their distress—“It must be nerve wracking to tell someone you’ve known for so long”—and reassure them with commitment to love in action—“I’m here to listen and support you. I am on your side.”
- 4. *Love needs no modifiers.*** “I love you” is a complete sentence. Though your heart is undoubtedly in the right place, inserting words like “still” or “anyway” into your proclamation of adoration subtly disregards what your beloved just disclosed. And it implies that their sexual orientation or gender identity is a barrier your love had to overcome. Think of this way: Would you rather hear that God still loves you or that God loves you? The former instills insecurity, the latter stability.

If you've read this far, it's safe to assume you're doing the best you can with the LGBTQ+ people in your life. That's great—me too! Here's the thing though: we all still make mistakes. Let's look at a few examples where a good faith response had unintentional negative impacts.

Scenario 1

Marcus: "I'm gay, Dad."

Dad: "It's ok. I already thought as much."

Marcus: "Oh. How?"

Dad: "Well, I don't know. I mean, you're always dancing and performing."

This good faith attempt is problematic because it may unintentionally:

1. **Compound shame.** Even if they grew up in loving homes, many LGBTQ+ people harbor internalized shame around their sexual orientations and gender identities simply because our culture openly tolerates homophobia and transphobia. Imagine finding the courage to divulge an emotionally fraught secret only to have the other person implicitly or explicitly say it was obvious all along. Doesn't feel great, does it? Pro tip: Focus on creating a no-pressure space for your loved one to share (or not!) whatever they need to. That could sound like:

"I love you. I'm listening."

"I believe you. Tell me more."

"Thank you for trusting me. What do you need me to know?"

2. **Derail the conversation.** By centering himself right off the bat, the father shifts the focus from the son's experience to his perception. An LGBTQ+ person's coming-out is about them, not us.
3. **Perpetuate sexism.** Why is "dancing and performing" evidence of sexual orientation? Intuitively you know—we've been socialized to gender absolutely *everything* under the sun (e.g. "Dancing is for girls." "Boys shouldn't wear pink!"). While arbitrary and unfounded, these types of designations reinforce heterosexist, misogynist ideas that say femininity is inferior to masculinity which hurts and oppresses *everyone*. Pro tip: Just don't.

Scenario 2

Thea: "I just wanted to let you know that 'female' or 'woman' doesn't adequately describe who I know myself to be. 'Nonbinary' best captures my gender and I'd like you to use they/them pronouns for me from now on."

1 From B.T. Harman's blog "Blue Babies Pink". www.bluebabiespink.com

Ana María: “No problem. I’m good with gay people.”

Thea: “Thanks, but I’m not talking about my orientation; I am explaining my experience of gender.”

Ana María: “Ok, I don’t get that exactly, but I will use they/them for you. I hope you’ll understand when I slip up and use she/her every once in a while.”

This good faith attempt is problematic because it may *unintentionally*:

- 1. Create more work for the queer person.** Ana María conflates Thea’s gender identity with their sexual orientation which then subtly shifts the conversation away from Thea’s experience to Ana María’s ignorance. Of course, allyship doesn’t require omniscience—we all learn when we learn and not a moment before—but it does require self-awareness. Pro tip: When someone comes out to you and you don’t fully understand the terms they’re using, resist the urge to center your education. Simply affirm and take mental notes to google later. This moment is about them, not you.
- 2. Prioritize comfort over effort.** As is to be expected, Ana María anticipates making mistakes as she learns to use different words for her friend. And you know what? Making mistakes is totally normal! But grace can only be given by a person not demanded from a person. When we do the latter with our LGBTQ+ loved ones, we signal that our effort is contingent upon them preserving our comfort. Let’s be real, using new pronouns for an old friend can feel like a clunky inconvenience, and nobody likes to be corrected. But the work of allyship requires conscious effort on our part to own both our mistakes and our plans to grow. That could sound like:

“I will use your correct pronouns and I am comfortable with you correcting me.”

After the person corrects you: “Yes, thank you for reminding me.”

“You are like my older sister. Wait, let me try that again: You are like my older sibling!”

“Thea is coming over tonight. What should we cook for her—excuse me—them?”

Pro tip: Avoid (over-) apologizing. Perhaps a simple “I’m sorry” to acknowledge your mistake may be appropriate, but overwrought expressions of horrified guilt are not productive. In fact, such displays often derail the conversation at hand, forcing the other person to abandon their own feelings in order to comfort you.

Scenario 3

Finally, as much as it pains me, I must share a real example from my life before I had repented of non-affirming theology. One late night in college, a dear friend and I sat in my idling car exchanging the following words:

Derek: “Amy, I have to confess something. I think...I think I might be gay. I know it’s a sin.”

Me: “No, no you’re not! That’s a lie that the enemy is trying to trick you with. You’re just struggling with same-sex attraction.”

Derek, crying: “How do I fix it? I feel so hopeless.”

Me: “We will fight this together. God loves you. He meets you where you are but He doesn’t leave you there. He can heal you of this. You just have to pray and surrender.”

Almost fifteen years later and this memory still haunts me. Was I doing the best I could with what I had? Yes. Was my sincere intention to be kind, loving, hopeful and helpful? Yes. Were my best good intentions also harmful to someone I loved? Yes. I share this for two reasons:

- 1. Allyship focuses on impact over intention.** Just because I was doing my—misguided and misinformed—best doesn’t excuse the very real damage I unintentionally inflicted upon my friend. It doesn’t negate the need for accountability. Conversely, when we’re able to acknowledge that our sincere best was, in fact, quantifiably bad, we’re much better positioned to receive the grace necessary to repent, grow, and do better. Self-hatred and judgment are poor foundations for good allyship.
- 2. Allyship amplifies the voice of Love.** As I mentioned earlier, internalized homophobia and transphobia lurk in the hearts of many LGBTQ+ Christians, convincing them that in order to be worthy of God’s love they must adhere to heteronormativity. We must take care not to reinforce this fatal lie. If I could go back, I would say to Derek, “I’m listening, friend. I don’t know the answer, but I will hold space for you and your process.”

But that’s not what I said. Our friendship endured for only a year or two after this conversation. Even though I look back with great regret over the harm I inflicted, I’m relieved to report Derek is happy and healthy, working his dream job in his dream city.

Derek’s experience with me is an all too common one. According to a 2019 survey conducted by The Trevor Project “2 out of 3 of youth had experienced somebody—a parent, pastor, friend, or anybody else—trying to change their sexual orientation or gender identity.” And not every queer person survives these attempts. A study from The Family Acceptance Project says that LGBTQ+ youth whose parents subjected them to religious conversion therapy “attempted suicide at about **triple** the rate of youth who nobody tried to change.”²

All this data confirms what we may discern from Scripture: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”³ Sobering, isn’t it? But it’s also empowering—our words can revive wilting souls. The choice is ours.

2 emphasis added

3 Proverbs 18:21



What Does Allyship Require?

When I checked in to my first ever QCF Conference in 2019, the only thing I wanted more than an official ally pin was a nap. Reasoning that the pins would still be there after I got some much needed beauty rest, I headed up to my room. Hours later, I stopped by the QCF merch booth—not one ally pin left. *BUT HOW WILL PEOPLE KNOW HOW MUCH OF A MARTYR FOR THE CAUSE I AM?* I screamed internally. I'm joking, of course. Mostly.

But seriously, I was disappointed. The previous summer, I had been dismissed from my beloved ministry job for refusing to sign a statement of belief that specifically marginalized LGBTQ+ people. By January I still hadn't found another job and was struggling just as much emotionally as financially. So when I arrived in Chicago for the conference, thanks to the generosity of the gay Christian community in Atlanta that had adopted me, I was feeling entitled to some recognition for my sacrifice. *Hadn't I earned this pin?*

Fast forward two days and it's my birthday. Friends from my Atlanta community whisked me downtown for dinner. And it was delightful. After stuffing ourselves and sharing stories, one member of the group shyly handed me a birthday card. As I ripped open the envelope, a tiny, shiny something clinked onto the table. It was an ally pin.

Tearing up as I read the sweet messages scribbled inside the card, I felt so convicted. I had been trying to buy what could only be bestowed. As April Vanlonden explained in the QCF 2020 breakout session "Transgender and The Bible":

*I don't call myself an ally because that is an honorific that is given.
It is not for me to say that I am ally,
it is for [LGBTQ+ persons] to say that I am an ally,
if I am.*

The title "ally" is not for me or you to claim. Attempting to do so reduces the work of allyship to commerce, in which we trade in our activism for acclaim, our sacrifices for status. At some point or another, we all fall prey to our own pride, and the antidote is simple if hard:

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." John 15:13, NRSV

So, if the work of allyship is love in action without regard for recognition, then what must we lay down?

I'm so glad you asked.

- 1. Our resources.** As in energy, time, and money. You'll need to expend all three to educate yourself on what your cisgender, heterosexual privilege has shielded you from knowing until now. How has the church and state historically marginalized LGBTQ+ people? What current issues of discrimination and prejudice does the queer community currently face? An old rabbinic story sums up this kind of research thusly: How can you love me if you don't know what hurts me?¹
- 2. Our comfort.** If you've ever been the only one in a group not to chuckle at a sexist or racist joke, then you know what I'm talking about here. Confronting homophobia and transphobia in others, even if only with stony silence after hateful punchlines, is not usually a pleasant experience. Especially if you're a peacekeeper who prefers not to ruffle any feathers. Ruffle them anyway. Sometimes the most Christlike thing we can do is cause a scene. (See Mark 11:15-18 for Jesus' one-man riot.) Your discomfort is worth LGBTQ+ people's safety.
- 3. Our pride.** I'll say it again: nobody likes being corrected. But allyship requires us to put our big britches on and actively invite the queer people in our lives to give us feedback. Don't make the mistake of valuing your own self-conception as an ally (like I did) over actual connection with your LGBTQ+ loved ones. As the marginalized group in this situation, they are the ones with the authority to say what is and isn't allyship. Pro tip: When a queer person ventures to correct you, more often than not the best response isn't "I'm sorry" but rather "Thank you." Try it out!

THE WORK OF ALLYSHIP IS LOVE IN ACTION WITHOUT REGARD FOR RECOGNITION

This process of laying down our resources, comfort, and pride is not one and done, unfortunately. I think of it as an expression of metanoia, which is the practice of continual repentance. And it's also only the foundation of allyship. We lay down so that we can stand up—for the LGBTQ+ community, starting with the most marginalized.

1 Levine, Amy-Jill. *The Misunderstood Jew*. 116



How Do I Stand Up for Transgender People?

When I first began immersing myself in the gay Christian community in Atlanta, I was shocked to hear many cisgender queer people express ignorance, discomfort, and even prejudice against transgender people. Unfortunately, every transgender person I know has confirmed what I witnessed: even within the LGBTQ+ community, transgender people are more vulnerable to suffering because of misinformation and discrimination. Pro tip: Nobody is automatically (or permanently) an ally of an oppressed group, so don't be surprised when you find yourself noticing the transphobia of cisgender lesbians and gay men as well as that of straight cisgender people—confront it regardless.

And then there's the violence inflicted by the broader culture:

- According to the American Medical Association, there is an “epidemic of violence” against transgender people, especially black transgender women.¹
- Rampant discrimination in the workplace has led to transgender people experiencing unemployment at 3 times the national average and at 4 times the national average for transgender people of color.²
- Due to our culture's high tolerance for transphobia, a truly alarming rate of suicidal ideation³ exists among transgender youth. According to a study from the American Academy of Pediatrics: “More than half of transgender male teens who participated in the survey reported attempting suicide in their lifetime, while 29.9 percent of transgender female teens said they attempted suicide. Among nonbinary youth, 41.8 percent of respondents stated that they had attempted suicide at some point in their lives.”⁴

So, what can our allyship look like for our trans loved ones?

1. Use correct pronouns. This includes gently but firmly correcting others when they misgender a

1 <https://www.healio.com/news/primary-care/20190612/ama-adopts-antitransgender-violence-minor-vaccination-consent-human-trafficking-policies>

2 Statistics supplied by Nick Adams, GLAAD Director of Trans Media and Representation, in the documentary *Disclosure*.

3 Defined as “passive thoughts about wanting to be dead or active thoughts about killing oneself, not accompanied by preparatory behavior” from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK137739/table/ch1.t1/>

4 <https://www.hrc.org/blog/new-study-reveals-shocking-rates-of-attempted-suicide-among-trans-adolescen>

trans person. Pro tip: When referring to a transgender person’s life experience before they came out as transgender, still use the pronouns they currently use. For example, I use he/him—not she/her pronouns—when talking about my trans male friend’s childhood even though at the time he presented as female.

2. **Use correct names.** If a trans person has changed their name as part of their social transition, use that name. Failure to do so can be literally fatal. Suicidal ideation and behavior tends to be very high in the transgender youth population, but these risks drastically decrease when the child’s chosen name is used in their family and social contexts.⁵
3. **Educate yourself.** By now you should recognize a common theme of this guide: research is a love language.

First, recognize and disrupt problematic misconceptions. For example:

- Don’t entertain questions about passing. Last year, a white, cis-gay male friend asked me if one of my trans friends passed as a woman. I’m embarrassed to say my response was less eloquent allyship and more dumbstruck bumbling. Now I know what to say: “I understand your curiosity, but that question is both problematic and incredibly dangerous. Trans women don’t need to “pass” as women. They are women. And no woman has to look or act a certain way to be treated as such.” Addressing this common trope is vital because far too many trans people (particularly trans women of color⁶) have suffered murderous violence at the hands of enraged men who feel they’ve been “duped.”⁷
- Intercept outdated terms. Even the best among us can innocently employ problematic or even pejorative terms, bless our hearts. But since allyship focuses on impact rather than intention, correct ourselves we must. This abbreviated chart from GLAAD⁸ provides some guidance:

“
Pro tip: Nobody is automatically (or permanently) an ally of an oppressed group.”

5 [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(18\)30085-5/fulltext#intraref0010a](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(18)30085-5/fulltext#intraref0010a)

6 <https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-trans-and-gender-non-conforming-community-in-2020>

7 <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/transmisogyny-killing-transgender-women-n415286>

8 <https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>

PROBLEMATIC	PREFERRED
Transgenders, a transgender (it should never be used as a noun)	Transgender person, transgender community (use it as an adjective)
Transgendered	Transgender (no need for this adjective to have the -ed suffix)
Transgenderism (dehumanizes transgender people and falsely reduces them to a condition)	Being transgender (emphasizes the experience without dehumanizing the people)
Sex change, pre-operative, post-operative (surgery isn't a required component of being transgender)	Transition (more inclusive, less focused on medical history which should be private)

Intercepting outdated/problematic terms sounds like: “Hey, so I recently learned that referring to transgender people as pre- or post-operative is actually offensive. Just thought I would pass that tidbit along!” Finally, do not hesitate to call out defamatory terms like tranny, transvestite, she-male, it, or “shim”. How such cruel, shameful language must grieve the heart of God!

Second, expose yourself to transgender media, and prioritize works created by transgender people. Here are some suggestions to get started:

- For adults:
 - *Disclosure* (Netflix)
 - Q Christian Fellowship’s Affirmation Guide for Trans and Gender Expansive Identities
 - *Pose* (Netflix)
 - *Transforming* by Austen Hartke
 - Paula Williams’ TED Talks⁹
 - *Passing* (Amazon Prime)
 - *Growing Up Trans* (PBS Frontline)
- For kids:
 - *Introducing Teddy* by Jess Walton (Pre-K—K)
 - *Red: A Crayon’s Story* by Michael Hall (Pre-K—1)
 - *Julian is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love (Pre-K—2)
 - *It Feels Good to Be Yourself* by Theresa Thorn (Pre-k—3)

4. Don’t laugh at transphobic jokes. And confront those who make them. Humor communicates our values, whether we consciously intend it to or not, so “it’s just a joke” isn’t a valid defense. Pro tip:

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrYx7HaUIMY>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NZCWeBNPeE>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edLQdf4o0cg>

Don't tolerate any zingers that position *any* trans or cis person's gender or genitalia as the punchline.

- 5. Offer support.** For trans people interacting with the healthcare system, either for routine check-ups or major confirmation surgeries, the grueling cycle of ignorance, refusal, and never-ending reschedules can induce despair. While it's unlikely that you can directly advocate with medical professionals on behalf of your trans loved one (unless you are their legal guardian or spouse), you can offer vital emotional and physical support.
- Create space for your trans loved one to vent their pain and frustrations to you without judgment. If they are comfortable sharing important appointments with you, note these in your calendar and set reminders to check in with them afterwards. Practice reflective listening, whether face-to-face, over the phone, or by text. Pro tip: Unless you have interacted with the healthcare system as a trans person, refrain from sharing your own stories to demonstrate you know how they feel. These good faith attempts at empathy frequently backfire. Instead, simply believe their lived experience without needing to personally relate to it.

BELIEVE THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCE WITHOUT NEEDING TO PERSONALLY RELATE TO IT.

- If or when your trans loved one undergoes any confirmation surgeries (not all trans people transition medically), brainstorm practical ways to meet their needs. For example, offer to create and manage a meal train.
- Consider starting or supporting funds for trans people's medical care. At the time of this writing, equitable access to healthcare for trans people faces disturbing threats from multiple angles.¹⁰ On top of that, thanks to the intersection of multiple oppressed identities, transgender people are less likely to have health insurance and more likely to experience poverty.
- Finally, keep an eye on your own emotional reservoirs. Caregiving of any kind taxes the giver, and sometimes our empathy for our trans loved ones' suffering can overwhelm our ability to cope—don't beat yourself up for being human. Pro tip: Seek support from other cisgender allies when you feel tired and need comfort. No doubt your trans loved ones are wonderful friends, but it's

¹⁰ <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/06/12/868073068/transgender-health-protections-reversed-by-trump-administration>

not their responsibility to lighten this particular load.

6. Normalize gender talk. Part of the privilege of being cisgender is trusting people will correctly assume your gender based on your name and gender expression. Gender expression includes clothing, cosmetic usage, and mannerisms. Transgender people do not enjoy this privilege. Imagine being the only person at a family reunion or career conference with your pronouns on your nametag. Sure, that information helps others, but being singled out can feel awkward or possibly humiliating. That's where cisgender folks can alleviate the tension by announcing their own pronouns. Try noting your pronouns on email signatures, event name tags, or as part of group introductions. By normalizing this practice in our everyday lives, we can minimize the alienation transgender people may experience.





How Do I Stand Up for LGBTQ+ People in My Family?

Ah, family gatherings. At their best, these reunions deepen bonds and foster healing connections, reviving us with love. But for many of us, the family dinner table hosts as much fighting as feasting, especially when it comes to conflicting convictions regarding sex, sexuality, orientation, and gender. Oftentimes, we face the most severe consequences when we practice allyship in non-affirming family contexts. Otherwise lovely relatives deploy threats of censure and disconnection to shame us into silently upholding the homophobic and transphobic status quo. Or the opposition may manifest more subtly. In any case, we must strengthen our tolerance for experiencing the discomfort inherent in allyship. Here are a few ways to create safer family environments:

- 1. *Communicate your affirmation.*** If you have an LGBTQ+ person in your immediate or extended family, be sure this person is aware of your support. This is especially important if your family is Christian, given how the modern church has persecuted sexual and gender minorities. Otherwise, your family members may presume you hold a “traditional” view on these matters. Pro-tip: Don’t wait for a relative to come out to voice support for LGBTQ+ lives.
- 2. *Be intentional.*** The first time my sister Rosemary brought Ginger to a church function early on in their relationship, my mother was tempted to introduce Ginger as Rosemary’s friend. While I understood and even resonated with my mother’s desire to avoid discomfort, I pointed out that such mislabeling would ultimately dishonor and shame Rosemary and Ginger. If your queer loved one is in a relationship, use the titles and terms they use to describe their beloved. And encourage other family members to do the same. If your queer loved one is unattached but interested in dating, honor their identities and orientation.
- 3. *Normalize grief.*** Cisgender heterosexuality is more than an orientation. It’s a story. Boy meets girl, falls in love, and has children. And vice versa. When this deeply embedded narrative gets disrupted by a loved one’s coming out, we often need to grieve. But according to researcher Brené Brown, we humans will do just about anything to avoid feeling the rushing void and loss of control that grief brings. Keep this in mind as you witness family members ward off grief through anger, indifference, and controlling behaviors—you’ll have more compassion. If appropriate, tenderly invite family members to embrace their grief. For example, a mother may need to grieve the loss of a future daughter-in-law after her son comes out as gay. Or a daughter may find herself struggling to

reconcile news of a parent's transition with how she'd always perceived their relationship—*Have I misunderstood my parent my whole life? Does this mean I never even really knew them?* Make no mistake: grief doesn't signal failure or moral judgment. It's just a natural response to change. Allyship looks like creating a safe, brave space for willing family members to face and integrate their grief. The only way out is through.

- 4. Set boundaries when necessary.** Exposure to intentional, overt homophobia and transphobia is deadly for queer people. In light of that reality, consider what limits or rules you may need to implement in order to protect LGBTQ+ people from family members who refuse to show basic human consideration. Perhaps that might mean disinviting certain relatives from events in your home. Or, if you are attending an event where your queer loved ones feel uncomfortable or unsafe, offer to leave early with them. But whatever you do, clearly communicate the boundary without malice, explaining exactly what is permissible and what is not. Allyship speaks the truth in love.
- 5. Find support.** Navigating family dynamics can be particularly difficult for parents of queer youth, even when those youth are well-established adults! Check out QCF's Relational Guide for Parents of Newly Out LGBTQ+¹ People for more specific help. Other resources for support include your local chapter of PFLAG² and the book *Embracing the Journey* by Greg and Lynn McDonald.
- 6. And don't forget to celebrate!** Anniversaries of relationships, name changes, confirmation surgeries³, and coming-outs are all opportune times to demonstrate that allyship is as at least as much about sheer delight as it is advocacy. Nothing communicates unfettered acceptance quite like joy.



**We must strengthen
our tolerance for
experiencing the
discomfort inherent
in allyship.**

1 <https://www.qchristian.org/guides/parents>

2 <https://pflag.org/find-a-chapter>

3 Merriam-Webster's definition: any of several surgical procedures that a transgender person may choose to undergo in order to obtain the physical characteristics that match their gender identity.



How Do I Stand Up for LGBTQ+ People in My Church?

Upon reading the above title, Rosemary remarked, “Church is the least safe place for my family.” All I could do was nod in sad solidarity. Perhaps your experience is different, but the reality is most Christian churches harbor deeply anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs. While we can’t solve this situation in one fell swoop, we can take steps toward making churches safer for our LGBTQ+ siblings in Christ.

1. Assess your church’s perspective. Unless you’re affiliated with a denomination that clearly delineates its policies, you may need to examine your church’s membership guidelines or check in directly with your pastors. The policies regarding LGBTQ+ people can fall anywhere along a range of stances, including:¹

- **Welcoming:** unless coupled with affirming, typically corresponds with “love the sinner, hate the sin” non-affirming theology; LGBTQ+ people “welcome” to attend but cannot become members, lead, or have their weddings officiated.
- **Discerning:** indicates a congregation is consciously, actively thinking through possibly transitioning from being non-affirming to either affirming or inclusive.
- **Affirming:** practices full equality for LGBTQ+ people, no double standards on requirements for membership or leadership based on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Inclusive:** pursues full equality for LGBTQ+ people, but allows for members to have differences in beliefs as long as the convictions of the privileged do not oppress or marginalize the vulnerable.

2. Urge public transparency. Regardless of where your church has currently settled, ask the leadership to publicize their policies. LGBTQ+ people have a right to know what kind of environment they are walking into. Imagine connecting deeply with a church community only to have the carpet yanked from under you when the pastor refuses to perform your wedding ceremony, bars you from leadership, or even shuns you from the fellowship. Feels awful, doesn’t it? Clarity prevents these kinds of bait and switches from damaging LGBTQ+ Christians.

¹ Definitions summarized from QCF’s Relational Guide for Clergy by Rev. Danny Cortez.

3. Start conversations. If your church is not already affirming/inclusive, talk with your leaders to see if they're ready to begin a discernment process. That process can include a church wide book study, a discernment committee, and/or hosting panels with discussion groups. Offer resources such as:

- Q Christian Fellowship's Relational Guide for Clergy
- *Why Churches Need to Talk About Sexuality* by Mark Wingfield
- Churchclarity.org/resources
- *She's My Dad* by Jonathan Williams

4. Have an eye for detail. Even in affirming spaces, leaders can still overlook the small ways in which heteronormativity lingers in the environment, subtly communicating judgment. For example:

- **Bathrooms.** Are all the facilities coded by gender? If yes, then perhaps the leadership might consider making them gender neutral, or designating at least one restroom as gender neutral, if there are more than two.
- **Forms.** Do official documents allow for gender-expansive options? Or can you only designate yourself male or female, with no distinction for gender identity/expression? When registering for events or volunteer opportunities, is there a space designated to note pronouns?
- **Children.** Not every kid has one dad and one mom—does the language of Sunday School or the required documents reflect that reality? Encourage paperwork that asks for “parents” rather than moms and dads.
- **Leadership.** Is everyone who holds a microphone cisgender and heterosexual? Representation matters.

5. Finally, if the church leadership refuses to change, consider leaving. After you have put in the effort to effect change, you must be willing to forego your comfort if the environment remains damaging to your LGBTQ+ siblings. This may ultimately require leaving. And especially if you have children who are LGBTQ+, leaving an environment that does not affirm them may literally save their lives.

**THE REALITY IS MOST CHRISTIAN CHURCHES
HARBOR DEEPLY ANTI-LGBTQ+ BELIEFS.**



How Do I Stand Up for LGBTQ+ People in My Nation?

Don't be afraid to get political!

Ugh, you may be thinking, *can we just not?* I hear you. Sex, religion, and politics—the forbidden three of polite discourse. But, we must. And hey, we've already covered the first two, and you're still reading, so you can do this. I believe in you.

1. **Attend Pride, respectfully.** Yes, it is possible to attend Pride disrespectfully. Sidestep potentially problematic behavior with these pointers:
 - **Know Pride's history.** Back in 1969, trans women of color led an uprising against police brutality at the Stonewall Inn in NYC. For a comprehensive look at how this historic protest turned into Pride parades, check out [The Complete History of Pride](#).
 - **Prioritize queer attendees.** Imagine attending a friend's birthday party and demanding the first slice of cake, centering all the attention on yourself, and clamoring to be first in all the activities. Yikes, right? Pro tip: Treat LGBTQ+ people at Pride like it's their birthday.
 - **Respect people's dignity and bodily autonomy.** Objectifying queer people takes many forms: openly gawking at displays of affection or imaginative outfits, treating individuals as object lessons, or touching their bodies without consent. That last one should go without saying, but the disturbing trends of straight women groping gay men¹ and straight men assaulting lesbians suggest otherwise.²

Finally, contrary to propaganda from churches like Westboro Baptist, Pride is not a lewd orgy of human depravity. It's actually rather family-friendly! Most Pride events feature "family zones" that provide activities for families with children.

2. **Engage your representatives.** As I write this, we just celebrated a landmark Supreme Court victory championing the rights of LGBTQ+ workers. However, there is still much legislation that

1 <https://www.flare.com/identity/bachelorette-party-gay-bar/>

2 <https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/07/europe/homophobic-attack-london-intl-scli-gbr/index.html>

institutionalizes homophobia and transphobia. As uncomfortable as you might be with calling politicians, representative democracy doesn't actually work if we don't participate. Pro tip: When calling your representatives, remember that the staffer answering the phone is likely a college intern that has been yelled at all day by angry constituents, so don't be intimidated or intimidating. A sample script sounds like: "Hi _____, Thank you so much for taking my call. My name is _____, and I am a constituent of (elected official). I was hoping you could pass along the following sentiments to (elected official). I am concerned about (state the issue and what you would like the leader to do). That's it! Do you need any further information from me?" Additionally, check to see if the official has social media accounts and voice your concerns there. Here are some issues you can contact your local and national leaders about:

- **LGBTQ+ "panic" defense.** This legal strategy shifts blame for violent acts committed against queer people from the perpetrators themselves to the victims, drawing on homophobia and transphobia as a reasonable explanation for violence, including murder. You can check out [LGBTQ+ "Panic" Defense](#) to see if your state has banned this practice. Few have.
 - **Hate Crime laws.** Most states have laws that specifically advance justice for minority populations targeted by hate, but a handful do not. Research to see whether your state is one of them, and contact your representatives as needed.
 - **Equality Act.** While the Supreme Court's recent ruling in favor of extending protection to LGBTQ+ workers is a huge victory, there is still more work to be done. The Equality Act ensures that all the protections of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would apply to LGBTQ+ people. This legislation has wide bipartisan support and has already passed in the House of Representatives. Contact your senator to communicate your support for the bill.³
 - **Sign petitions.** Organizations like the Human Rights Commission, Allout.org, and Faithful America frequently host petitions lobbying for more justice for LGBTQ+ people.
- 3. Donate.** First, look for local groups in your area that are working for the good of the queer community. Then, check out notable national organizations like The Audre Lorde Project, LGBTQ Freedom Fund, The Trans Latina Coalition, Casa Ruby, and National Black Justice Coalition.
 - 4. Vote.** If you're serious about the work of allyship, your vote should match your beliefs. Support local and national candidates who are affirming, inclusive, and justice-oriented in their policy work.

3 <https://action.aclu.org/send-message/pass-equality-act>



Support for You

Whew.

That was a lot, but you made it to the end—congrats! Except this is really just the beginning. If you're feeling a bit overwhelmed or preemptively worn out, I understand. Allyship is work. And like all worthy endeavors, it must be a group effort. Remember, not even Jesus was a lone wolf.

If you don't already have a support network around you, check out these suggestions for finding kindred spirits:

1. Q Christian's Community Groups, including Ally small groups
2. National organizations like PFLAG, HRC, Family Acceptance Project, and Mama Bears.
3. Inclusive or affirming church communities via churchclarity.org.
4. Q Christian Fellowship annual conference. And be sure to check out the Allyship Affinity Gathering!

Be intentional about building community with likeminded people. Because, trust me, you'll need it. Justice is inherently divisive—one need only look at the words of Jesus for proof:

“For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household.” Matthew 10:35-36, NRSV

Allyship, as a practice of justice, can be alienating. Speaking from personal experience, it is not uncommon to lose friends, jobs, opportunities, and the respect of dear colleagues or loved ones because of affirmation and advocacy for LGBTQ+ people. I pray you don't have to experience any of those losses, but if you do, take heart. The same Jesus who came with a sword also comes with a salve:

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.” Luke 18:29-30, NIV



Conclusion

Let's revisit August 16th, 2014 when my beloved spice girls—Rosemary and Ginger— said “I do.”

The blazing afternoon has faded to a balmy evening, and all the guests are gathered beneath a large tent enjoying dinner and drinks. Halfway through the meal, Ginger stands up and invites anyone inclined to give a speech to come on up. From the head table, my mother darts forward, playfully batting away another contender for the microphone. As the indulgent chuckles die down, my mother begins, her Australian lilt charming the audience immediately.

“About twenty-nine years ago, I discovered I was pregnant. And my first thought was, ‘A child! Just what I’ve always wanted!’ Then, the time came round for the ultrasound, and you, you freak,” she wags her finger at Rosemary affectionately, “weren’t in the right position, so the doctor guessed that you were a boy. ‘A son! Just what I’ve always wanted!’ I thought. Months later, out you popped—a girl! And I thought, ‘A daughter! Just what I’ve always wanted!’”

And on she goes, recounting milestone moments in Rosemary’s life, each event punctuated by the refrain “Just what I’ve always wanted!” Sitting in the crowd, I can feel everyone’s faces glowing with delight as they eat up her every word. Then things take a turn.

“About ten years ago, you brought Ginger home. And I thought “Just . . . wait a minute. This is not what I always wanted.” Everyone holds their breath, including me. I sense a collective anxiety rise from the audience: *Is this woman really about to condemn her daughter’s relationship on the day of her wedding?* Sure sounds that way.

But her story isn’t over yet.

“I did not readily accept Ginger into our family. And yet,” she turns to address Rosemary’s beloved, “you were so patient and so *long*-suffering.” A sheepish grin from Ginger elicits soft laughter from the crowd. As my mother continues confessing a litany of transgressions against Love itself, her words lay bare every heart under that tent. For some, it is the utter vulnerability of a parent owning their sins. For others, it’s witnessing a family redemption they can only imagine. For all of us, a reckoning.

“Ginger, you’ve been a part of our family for a long time, even when I didn’t see it. I’m so glad we’ve made it official today, because I can honestly say,” my mother smiles, “you are just what I’ve always

wanted.”

At the time of this writing, it’s been six years since that holy moment. And still, people remind me of how much my mother’s toast meant to them. Not in spite of the struggle in the story but because of it. At the heart of allyship is the ministry of reconciliation, and all reconciliation hinges on humility, repentance, and perseverance. So whether you’re reconciling non-affirming relatives with LGBTQ+ family members, seemingly contradictory Bible verses with on-the-fence churches, or the laws of the land with the actual practice of justice, know this: The story isn’t over yet.

Keep going.





Resources

But What If I'm Not Ready to Become Affirming?

Walking the Bridgeless Canyon by Kathy Baldock (canyonwalkerconnections.com)

Transforming: The Bible and The Lives of Transgender Christians by Austin Hartke

God and The Gay Christian by Matthew Vines (reformationproject.org)

Changing Our Mind by David Gushee

Does Jesus Really Love Me? by Jeff Chu

God Believes in Love by Bishop Gene Robinson

Refocusing My Family by Amber Cantorna

Blue Babies Pink: A Southern Coming Out Story in 44 Episodes by B.T Harman (available as a blog at bluebabiespink.com or as a podcast on iTunes)

Torn by Justin Lee

This I Know by Jim Dant

Our Lives Matter by Pamela Lightsey

Outside the Lines: How Embracing Queerness Will Transform Your Faith by Mihee Kim-Kort

Radical Love by Patrick Cheng

What Does Allyship Require?

[Transgender and The Bible](#) Breakout Session by Brent Walsh and April Vanlonden

How Do I Stand Up for Trans People?

For adults:

Disclosure (Netflix)

Q Christian Fellowship's [Affirmation Guide for Trans and Gender-Expansive Identities](#)

Pose (Netflix)

Transforming by Austen Hartke

Paula Williams' TED Talks¹

Passing (Amazon Prime)

Growing Up Trans (PBS Frontline)

1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrYx7HaUIMY>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NZCWeBNPeE>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edLQdf4o0cg>

For kids:

Introducing Teddy by Jess Walton (Pre-K—K)

Red: A Crayon's Story by Michael Hall (Pre-K—1)

Julian is a Mermaid by Jessica Love (Pre-K—2)

It Feels Good to Be Yourself by Theresa Thorn (Pre-k—3)

How Do I Stand Up For LGBTQ+ People in My Family?

Q Christian Fellowship's Relational Guide for [Parents of Newly Out LGBTQ+ People](#)

Embracing the Journey by Greg and Lynn McDonald

pflag.org

How Do Stand Up For LGBTQ+ People in My Church?

Q Christian Fellowship's Relational Guide for Clergy

Why Churches Need to Talk About Sexuality by Mark Wingfield

churchclarity.org/resources

She's My Dad by Jonathan Williams

How Do I Stand Up for LGBTQ+ People in My Nation?

<https://lgbtbar.org/programs/advocacy/gay-trans-panic-defense/>

hrc.org

glaad.org

pflag.org

Resources For Me

[Q Christian Community Group For LGBTQ+ Allies](#)

pflag.org

hrc.org

<https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/>

churchclarity.org

Resources For Struggling LGBTQ+ Loved Ones

Trevor Project Suicide Hotline

[Q Christian Fellowship Resources and Guides](#)



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