

# Coming Out Strong

Information and Resources for LGBTQA  
Brethren and Mennonite Youth

2010  
EDITION

Provided by Kaleidoscope,  
a program of



**BRETHREN MENNONITE COUNCIL**  
FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL  
AND TRANSGENDER INTERESTS

*Never tell a young person that anything cannot be done.  
God may have been waiting centuries for someone ignorant enough  
of the impossible to do that very thing. - G M Trevelyan*

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## Welcome to *Coming Out Strong*

No matter what older generations might sometimes say, being a young person is hard work. Figuring out who you are, learning how you fit into this world, and making decisions about the future takes anyone a lot of energy.

Doing all of that while experiencing the world as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning), can feel like one more layer of complications. On the other hand, lots of people find their life makes more sense and becomes easier after they realize they are LGBTQ. How easy or hard this experience is often depends on their own previous knowledge of LGBTQ people, as well as the beliefs of their friends, family, and community.

Luckily, it's a lot easier to be out as LGBTQ than it was a generation ago, or even a few years ago. This doesn't mean it's easy for everyone, but it does mean you have a pretty good chance of finding someone who can be supportive as you ask questions and learn to understand your sexual orientation or gender identity. Hopefully there will be supportive people in your family, school, and congregation. If that is not the case, check out the *Where's the Support?* section in this resource for lists of people and congregations that are open and willing to talk. And, of course, you can contact us at BMC.

BMC (The Brethren / Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests) has been around since 1976, and has always included youth and young adults in our work. BMC's *Kaleidoscope* program for youth and young adults (formerly called *The College Network*) began in 1996, and works to provide resources and support to LGBTQ youth and young adults within the Church of the Brethren and Mennonite denominations in the United States and Canada.

We hope that you find *Coming Out Strong* a helpful source of information. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact the BMC office at:

Brethren / Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests  
PO Box 6300  
Minneapolis MN 55406  
612.343.2060  
bmc@bmclgbt.org  
www.bmclgbt.org

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## Coming Out

*Coming out: The process in which a person first accepts their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.*

Coming out is a process of discovery that differs for every person and situation. It may seem overwhelming – many other people have experienced similar feelings when thinking about their own coming out. Whether you are just beginning to question your sexual orientation or gender identity, or have processed these thoughts for a while, it is important to remember that you are not alone. There are a lot of brave people out there, very similar to you, who have come out to many people and live healthy, happy lives. Remember that being LGBTQ is a part of you, but not your whole identity.

Although this can be a happy, celebratory process, many people have reported having feelings of fear or anxiety throughout the experiences surrounding coming out to loved ones. Keep in mind that even if you have been processing this part of your identity for quite a while, your parents, friends, and other loved ones have not. Often people whose initial reaction is that of anger or frustration may require a period to process the fact that their loved one is LGBTQ. After this initial period, conversation can occur.

“For me, coming out was like a breath of fresh air. I feel like I can breathe and be myself in a way that I never have before. It’s as if I was in a dim, windowless room, and now I’ve stepped out into sun and air and vibrant colors.” – Dwayne Hess

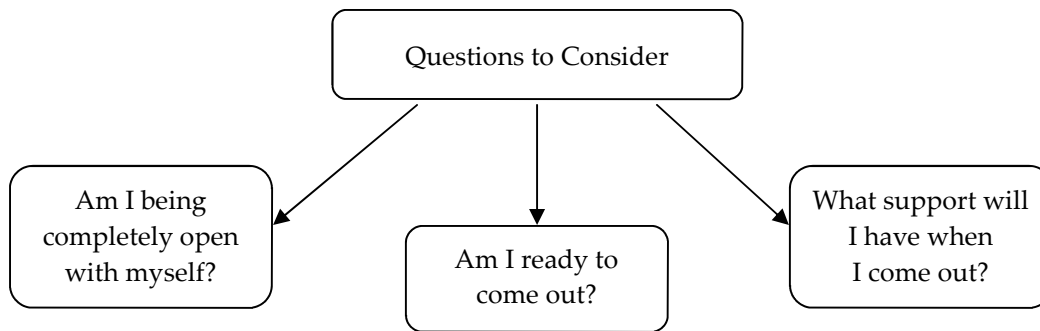
“Coming out has strengthened not only my confidence in myself, but set me on a path to forming relationships that cannot be built on the superfluous.” – Josih Hostetler

“As a trans guy, coming out and transitioning have freed me. Now, when I speak, it is my voice that I hear. When I look in the mirror, it’s my face that I see. And for the first time, my family and friends are free to love the whole me. I am healing from the outside in.” – Calvin Neufeld.

Many sources reference a continuum of coming out, including three main steps:

- Opening up to yourself
- Coming out
- Living Openly

## Opening up to yourself



Once you have asked yourself these questions, you may feel ready to start coming out. By first asking yourself these questions and considering the answers, you will be better prepared to start telling people about your LGBTQ identity.

## Coming Out

### *I'm ready... who should I tell first?*

Many people take the first step of telling a close friend or family member who they think will be supportive and loving. Think about the people you know... is there someone who talks about loving their gay brother, or having a favorite lesbian aunt? It is helpful if your process of coming out can start with a loving person who will support you on the rest of your journey. Often friends surprise us, however, and support may be found where you would least expect it.

### *What can I expect from the people I tell?*

Be cautious, because even if you see being LGBTQ as an exciting part of your identity, coming out isn't always greeted by others with excitement. People react with a variety of emotions after being told that someone whom they love is LGBTQ, including honored, curious, uncomfortable, supportive, and angry. Remember that your family and friends may feel unsure about what to do next. Some people have even experienced family and friends withdrawing from their lives for a period of time until they were comfortable enough to once again form a relationship with their LGBTQ Loved one. This experience can cause a great deal of hurt, but does not happen to everyone who comes out. Sometimes word travels more quickly than a person is ready for, in which case you may experience someone else "outing" you to others. It is important to remember that you may not always be able to control the information that reaches others about you.

### *I'm scared to tell my parents... any suggestions?*

Many young people become frightened of coming out to their parents, so you are not alone. If you are under 18 or not yet financially independent, it is important to consider multiple outcomes to coming out to your parents. Some young people who are afraid of the outcome of coming out to their parents delay this conversation until they are able to support themselves. The Human Rights Campaign has compiled some reactions for which you may want to prepare:

- Some parents may react in way that hurt. They may cry, get angry, or feel embarrassed.
- Some parents will feel honored and appreciate that you have entrusted them with an important piece of truth about yourself.
- Some parents will need to grieve the dreams they had for you, before they see the new, more genuine life you are building for yourself.
- They may ask where they “went wrong” or if they did something “to cause this.” Assure them that they did nothing wrong.
- Some may call being LGBTQ a sin, or attempt to send their child to a counselor or therapist in the baseless hope that they can “change.”
- Some parents will already know that you’re LGBTQ – or they might have an inkling. They may have been waiting for you to tell them, and find your doing so a relief.
- It may take time for a parent to absorb or come to terms with the information. Good or bad, their initial reaction may not reflect their feelings over the long term.

Human Rights Campaign, 2006

## **Living Openly**

The final portion of the coming out continuum, living openly, is often interwoven throughout the process of coming out. You get to decide how openly you want to live, and all of the positive and negative things about living openly are yours to consider. You will always meet new people and be confronted by the decision of whether or not you want to come out, so continue coming out to people at our own pace. There are no preset deadlines for when you must come out to certain people, and everyone experiences the coming out process in their own special way.

More information about coming out to parents and loved ones can be found in these pamphlets:

*A Resource Guide to Coming Out* ([www.hrc.org/documents/resourceguide\\_co.pdf](http://www.hrc.org/documents/resourceguide_co.pdf))

*Living Openly in Your Place of Worship* ([www.hrc.org/documents/livingopenly.pdf](http://www.hrc.org/documents/livingopenly.pdf))

*Transgender Visibility: a guide to being you* ([www.hrc.org/documents/transgender\\_visibility\\_guide.pdf](http://www.hrc.org/documents/transgender_visibility_guide.pdf))

*Resource Guide to Coming Out for African Americans* ([hrc.org/documents/AfricanAmericanResourceGuide.pdf](http://hrc.org/documents/AfricanAmericanResourceGuide.pdf))

*Guía de Recursos Para Salir Del Clóset* ([www.hrc.org/documents/recursos.pdf](http://www.hrc.org/documents/recursos.pdf))

# Bullying and Harassment

*National surveys of high school students continue to find high percentages of LGBTQ students reporting verbal or physical harassment and bullying. These range from the all too common “That’s so gay!” to verbal or physical threats and actions.*

## I’m being harassed at school... what should I do?

Tell someone. Although no school is perfect, most teachers, staff members, counselors, and administrators are taught to respond to bullying and harassment. Telling another student may not be enough to make the harassment stop, as another student only has as much power and authority as you do. It is important to report every incident to an adult at your school. If you need additional help or support, call the BMC office and we will do our best to assist you.

## How can I protect myself?

- Speak out when you hear slurs or negative comments like “that’s so gay.”
- Start a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) to help fight harassment and discrimination at school, or join the club if one already exists.
- All schools should have policies on bullying, though they may or may not specifically name harassment or bullying based on actual and perceived sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance, and behavior. Find out your school’s policy, and advocate for change if it does not already include sexual orientation and gender.
- Find out how to make a complaint when harassment occurs.
- Speak out in support of specific steps school districts and schools can take: publicizing and enforcing anti-harassment policies, supporting GSAs, providing resources to students, training teachers and other staff, measuring bias-related harassment in their local school district, and including LGBTQ people and information about sexual orientation and gender identity in the curriculum.

## What if my school doesn’t have a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA)?

All too often, students ask around and find out that their school definitely does not have a GSA. Often when this is the case, individuals start gathering courage and support and form a group in their school. Although forming a GSA can be very rewarding, the process itself can be tedious and even stressful. Be sure you have thought about the negative and positive aspects of starting a GSA before you begin. Gay-Straight Alliances throughout the country provide students with a safe space to discuss their LGBTQ identities with other members of the LGBTQ community, as well as allies.

## How do I start a GSA?

GSA's are a way for students to come together to create spaces of safety and support in their school. Not all schools are the same. If you are interested in forming a GSA, learn the rules about non-curricular clubs and follow them closely. By U.S. law (Equal Access Act, 1984), if a public school allows any non-curricular club, all non-curricular clubs must be allowed to form. In Canada, each school board has its own policies regarding creating and recognizing clubs. Creating a GSA should follow the same process as creating any other club.

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has detailed resources about starting a GSA available on their website. Go to [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org) and look for the *GLSEN Jump-start Guide for GSAs*.

For a quick look, see the pamphlet *10 Steps Towards Starting a Gay-Straight Alliance* ([www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN\\_ATTACHMENTS/file/1-1.pdf](http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/1-1.pdf)).

## US statistics on bullying from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network's 2007 National School Climate Survey

60.8% of students reported that they **felt unsafe** in school because of their sexual orientation, and 38.4% felt unsafe because of their gender expression.

36.3% of LGBT students reported having a gay-straight alliance group at school.

Nearly 9 in 10 students reported being **verbally** harassed at school because of their sexual **orientation**, 2 in 3 students because of their **gender** expression.

38.6% of students reported that school **staff never intervened** when homophobic remarks were made in their presence; 42.6% regarding negative remarks about gender expression.

Nearly 2 in 3 students reported hearing school **staff** make homophobic remarks.

Almost half of students had been **physically** harassed because of their sexual **orientation** and 3 in 10 students because of their **gender** expression.

22.1% reported being physically **assaulted** because of their sexual **orientation** and 14.2% because of their **gender** expression.

## Canadian statistics on bullying from Egale Canada's first National Climate Survey on Homophobia in Canadian Schools (2009)

3 in 4 LGBTQ students and 95% of transgender students **felt unsafe** at school, compared to 1 in 5 straight students.

6 in 10 LGBTQ students reported being **verbally** harassed about their sexual **orientation**.

9 in 10 transgender students, 6 in 10 LGB students, and 3 in 10 straight students were **verbally** harassed because of their expression of **gender**.

1 in 2 transgender students reported that **staff never intervened** when homophobic comments were made, compared to 34.1% of LGB respondents.

1 in 4 LGB students had been **physically** harassed about their sexual **orientation**.

1 in 5 LGBTQ students could talk to a parent very comfortably about LGBTQ issues. 3 in 4 could talk to a close friend.

Almost 2 in 5 transgender students and 1 in 5 LGB students reported being **physically** harassed due to their expression of **gender**.

### What About My Rights?

*You have the right to be yourself.*

Many LGBTQ youth today have reported feeling as if all their rights have been taken from them. Students struggle to form Gay-Straight Alliances, to wear a T-shirt to school supporting LGBTQ acceptance, to hold hands with their significant other in the hallway, and even to wear the clothes they feel comfortable in. It may seem as if fellow students, teachers, and administrators have all joined forces against you.

While the First Amendment of the United States Constitution grants the right to free speech, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (2b) grants the right to freedom of expression, these do not necessarily cover the rights for an LGBTQ youth in all situations and settings.

### ***Public Schools in Canada***

While the Canadian Teacher's Federation "advocates for educational systems that are safe, welcoming, inclusive, and affirming for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities,"<sup>1</sup> school policies and practices vary across regions. Contact your local school board to learn about policies and practices that affect LGBTQ students in your area.

### ***Public Schools in the US***

The American Civil Liberties Union has collected information regarding LGBTQ student rights. For example, a school does not have the right to tell the family of an individual that they are LGBTQ without their permission, teachers are not allowed to make anti-gay comments to or about LGBTQ individuals, and if heterosexual students are allowed to hold hands in the hallways, so are LGBTQ individuals.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Private Schools***

Private or religious schools are not necessarily required to follow the same laws or policies of public schools in their area. Contact the school to find out what its policies are. If necessary, talk to them about making their school a safer place for LGBTQ students.

## **You always have the right to safety**

Hate crimes occur when a perpetrator targets a victim because of his or her membership in a certain social group, usually defined by race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, gender identity, or political affiliation. Hate crimes "send a message" that an individual and "their kind" will not be tolerated, many times leaving the victim and others in their group feeling isolated, vulnerable and unprotected.<sup>3</sup>

In the US, The Hate Crimes Prevention Act was signed into law on October 28, 2009. It gives the Department of Justice the power to investigate and prosecute violence where a perpetrator has selected a victim because of the person's actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability.<sup>4</sup>

The Criminal Code of Canada prohibits the expression of hatred against "identifiable groups,"<sup>5</sup> and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms gives "individuals the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> CTF Policy 2009-10, section 5.7.1, [www.ctf-fce.ca/Documents/AboutCTF/EN/2009-10\\_CTF\\_Handbook\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ctf-fce.ca/Documents/AboutCTF/EN/2009-10_CTF_Handbook_EN.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.aclu.org/lgbt-rights\\_hiv-aids/know-your-rights-quick-guide-lgbt-high-school-students](http://www.aclu.org/lgbt-rights_hiv-aids/know-your-rights-quick-guide-lgbt-high-school-students)

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Campaign, [www.hrc.org/issues/hate\\_crimes.asp](http://www.hrc.org/issues/hate_crimes.asp)      <sup>4</sup> HRC, [www.hrc.org/laws\\_and\\_elections/5660.htm](http://www.hrc.org/laws_and_elections/5660.htm)

<sup>5</sup> CCC sections 318, 319, and Bill C-250 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda)*      <sup>6</sup> Charter section 15 (1)

## What Does the Bible Say?

*“Those who have sought to punish and oppress me have used the most powerful tool I know of as a weapon against me. They have perverted the Holy Bible – that powerful standard of justice for even the most marginalized among us – the touchstone of grace that offers hope and reconciliation – they have perverted the Bible into a tool of oppression.”*

*- Harry Knox, Director of Religion and Faith Program of the Human Rights Campaign*

People often use scripture to justify their own feelings of fear and misunderstanding regarding LGBTQ people. Keep in mind that scripture has also been used to support slavery, the subjugation of women, ethnic cleansing, etc.

Often in Church of the Brethren, Mennonite, and other religious communities, people will refer to up to seven passages in the Bible which are said to speak directly to homosexuality: Genesis 18-19, Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, Judges 19, Romans 1:26-27, I Corinthians 6:9-11, and I Timothy 1:9-11.

Many Biblical scholars challenge assumptions made about these passages. They believe that the passages must be understood in their historical context, and note that the concept of a same-sex sexual orientation as we understand it today was unknown several thousand years ago. They argue that these passages do not condemn loving, same-sex relationships, but have been misused as tools of LGBTQ oppression.

*Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind;  
and love your neighbour as yourself. - Luke 10*

In addition, many who are deeply committed to the Bible note that passages related to justice, hospitality, love, and relationship far outnumber and outweigh the passages cited above. The gospels do not record Jesus speaking about sexual orientation or gender identity. However, we do know that Jesus said much about loving our neighbors, and that he was often a critic of those who used scripture to do harm to other people.

If you would like to read more about understanding what the Bible says about homosexuality, some suggested readings to begin with are:

- *Homosexuality and the Bible*, by Walter Wink ([www.bridges-across.org/ba/winkhombib.htm](http://www.bridges-across.org/ba/winkhombib.htm))
- *Homosexuality and the Bible; a case study in the use of the Bible for ethics*, by Loren L. Johns ([www.ambs.edu/LJohns/Homosexuality.htm](http://www.ambs.edu/LJohns/Homosexuality.htm))
- *Some Beginning Thoughts on Homosexuality and Christian Ethics*, by Keith Graber Miller, in the Kaleidoscope Resource Packet ([www.bmclgbt.org/documents/resource.pdf](http://www.bmclgbt.org/documents/resource.pdf))

## What do Brethren and Mennonites Believe?

*There are currently over 50 Church of the Brethren or Mennonite Communities in the U.S. and Canada that have joined BMC's Supportive Communities Network. Every day more congregations, pastors and laypeople are speaking and acting for love, justice, and hospitality.*

The Church of the Brethren and Mennonite Church have both released rather lengthy explanations for their non-acceptance of lesbian and gay individuals. Neither church has released statements regarding individuals with various gender identities, but one would assume a similar response.

### Church of the Brethren

In 1983, The Church of the Brethren Annual Conference adopted the statement *Human Sexuality From A Christian Perspective*. This paper has since been the basis of other statements and resolutions passed by the Annual Conference body that exclude gay and lesbian members from leadership in the church. The passage included here is only one portion of the essay, one often sparking a large number of questions and comments. If you would like to read the statement in its entirety, including detailed biblical passages, contact the BMC office, or visit [www.cobannualconference.org/ac\\_statements/83HumanSexuality.htm](http://www.cobannualconference.org/ac_statements/83HumanSexuality.htm).

*The Church of the Brethren upholds the biblical declaration that heterosexuality is the intention of God for creation. Nature, in the very functional compatibility of male and female genitalia, confirms this biblical revelation that males and females are meant for each other. This intimate genital contact between two persons of opposite sexes is not just a physical union; it also embodies the interlocking of persons. This intimate companionship is heterosexuality at its fullest. It is the context for the formation of family.*

*Some persons, for reasons not fully understood, experience a romantic attraction for persons of the same sex. Some of these persons claim Christ as Lord and are actively involved in the life of the church. They need the active support and love of the church as they struggle with God's plan for their lives.*

*In ministry to homosexual persons, the church must guard against oversimplifying Christian morality. Instead the church should endeavor with Christian love and with gentle evangelistic skill to offer redemptive help. Proof texts, condemnation, and a sense of guilt will not empower change. Rejection isolates homosexual persons from the church. It frequently results in a preoccupation with and intensification of the very inclinations their accusers deplore. The power of the Gospel incorporates an acceptance of persons who seek forgiveness for their sins and who strive to be disciples of Jesus Christ. It is this non-accusatory acceptance that sets people free from guilt, depression, and fear. When we are saved it is not because we are without sin but because our sins are not held against us by God's grace. We are made whole through God's righteousness, not ours (Rom. 3:21-4:5)*

*In relating to homosexual persons, the church should become informed about such lifestyle options as the following.*

*Celibacy, refraining from sexual activities, is one alternative that homosexuals and bisexuals choose. The scriptural teaching on celibacy for heterosexuals provides a model for this lifestyle. Celibacy ought to be voluntary and not a requirement (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Those for whom celibacy is a gift and a special calling (Matt. 19:11-12; 1 Cor. 7:6-7) are to be honored and supported.*

*Conversion to a heterosexual orientation is another option. For many homosexual persons, however, this choice is extraordinarily difficult and complex. For some it is impossible. The church must seek to create a climate for hope, for praise of God, for renewed effort, for claiming and exploring the heterosexual dimensions of*

*being. Thus the Good News is shared with homosexual persons who seek to convert to heterosexuality. Yet not all are set totally free of homosexual feelings and urges. For some, impulses diminish, mindsets change, the grip of homosexuality is broken, and affectional and physical attraction to the opposite sex can begin.*

*Covenantal relationships between homosexual persons is an additional lifestyle option but, in the church's search for a Christian understanding of human sexuality, this alternative is not acceptable.*

(The underlined section was added to the paper as an amendment, and passed by a narrow margin.)

## **Mennonite Church**

The Mennonite Church has, since the early 1980's, made numerous statements involving homosexuality. Provided for you here is the 1991 *General Board Summary on Homosexuality* (written before MC USA and MC Canada separated). If you are interested in reading more from the Mennonite Church, contact the BMC office, or go to [www.ambs.edu/LJohns/ChurchDocs.htm](http://www.ambs.edu/LJohns/ChurchDocs.htm).

*In the interest of clarifying the stance of the General Board on homosexuality, and to further interpret the Purdue 87 statement on sexuality, the following summary statements are commended to the church. It is our hope that area conferences and congregations will provide pastoral leadership in addressing this concern with fidelity to the scriptures and a spirit of love and openness toward one another.*

- 1. We support and encourage the church to support the Purdue 87 action on Human Sexuality in the Christian Life*
- 2. We acknowledge and accept that some of our members have a homosexual orientation through no seeming choice on their part. We do not fully understand why or how this occurs.*
- 3. We invite homosexual persons in our congregations to commitment to Jesus Christ and participate in the community of faith, abstaining from homosexual genital relationships and rejecting promiscuity and any form of immoral behavior.*
- 4. We deplore the harsh and unloving attitudes often shown toward homosexual people in society-at-large and too often in the church.*
- 5. We support the several ministries in our church for assisting homosexual persons who desire a change in sexual orientation and freedom from same sex practice and compulsions, and encourage members to avail themselves of these ministries.*
- 6. We support the ministry of the Listening Committee for Homosexuality Concerns as a means of pastorally responding to homosexual people and their families, and to those with a range of concerns about homosexuality. (Since August 1992 there has been no Listening Committee.)*
- 7. We acknowledge there are among us sincere differences of understanding of the Scriptures, the causes of homosexuality, and the appropriate ethical standards for such persons, and encourage a spirit of humility and openness to the Spirit of God on this issue.*
- 8. We call on our area conferences and congregations to provide pastoral leadership in clarifying understandings and responding redemptively to homosexual people among us as a means of broadening the settings for discussion beyond the biennial General Assembly sessions.*
- 9. We call on our congregations to express love and grace towards homosexual persons, to receive into their membership those who express genuine faith and abstain from homosexual genital relationships, and to express pastoral openness to the pain and struggle of homosexual persons and their families.*
- 10. We encourage more attention to the broad range of human sexuality issues including heterosexual concerns and problems among us which may not receive attention due to fear and preoccupation with homosexuality.*

## Reflecting on the institutional church statements

Many who read these statements feel overwhelmed by their negative tone. However, it is important to note that each statement also includes points of openness.

The Church has not lived up to its call for understanding and Christian love. Nevertheless, the persistent efforts of a growing number of individuals, pastors and congregations advocating for the full and positive inclusion of LGBTQ people in the life of the Church are bringing change.

## Recent activities by young people in the church

### *Church of the Brethren*

A group of young adults (organized by Carrie Fry-Miller) prepared a written statement in response to a rather weak and self-serving 2009 CoB Annual Conference Standing Committee Statement (*A Statement of Confession and Commitment*), which was brought to the conference floor for adoption. The young adult statement (*A Call to Confession, Commitment and Action*), called upon the denomination to confess its mistreatment of LGBTQ people and commit itself to actions to correct this injustice. To date nearly 200 youth and young adults have signed the statement. This is the first time in over 30 years that young adults have addressed the CoB Annual Conference seeking change.

### *Mennonite Church USA*

Several young adults (Jen Yoder, Luke Yoder, Luke Miller, Phil Kendall, Jordan Zickafoose, Katie Hochstedler) decided it would be great if there was a strong young, queer positive presence at the 2009 MC USA Annual Conference, symbolized by wearing pink. Youth poured into the hospitality room for pink items and to share with other supportive youth and young adults. The campaign also included a singing presence in the conference center, and various times for youth to talk and strategize about the kind of church they want to have. ([www.pinkmenno.org](http://www.pinkmenno.org))

### *Mennonite Church Canada*

A group of young adults (Kirsten Freed, Jacob Quiring, Matt Wiebe) wanted to provide an opportunity for Mennonites in Canada to express their thoughts on welcoming LGBTQ people in the church. The Postcard Project gathered personal statements from Mennonites across the country and displayed them for delegates attending the 2008 and 2009 Annual Assemblies.

### ***Remember:***

- We are all children of God. That means God created you, and loves you as you are.
- A congregation should provide a nurturing environment where you can explore your faith.
- Church statements are not creedal, and many have changed over time.
- You are not alone. Contact the BMC office if you are looking for others to talk with.

## Where's the Support?

Whether you feel like you want a supportive community with which to worship or just someone to talk to, there are many places you could go. The BMC office, congregations and communities from the Supportive Communities Network (SCN) and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) are just a few ideas.

Depending on where you are in your journey, there are people listed in the "People willing to talk" section below who are open and willing to talk. These individuals are Brethren and Mennonite, young and old, LGBTQ and ally, family and friends. If you would like further contact information for someone and it is not listed, please contact the BMC office, and we may be able to provide you with additional ways in which to contact someone.

Each contact person is identified as being more familiar with either Brethren or Mennonite traditions, if they are LGBTQ / family / friends, and if they are a young adult. Also listed are any areas of special interest and/or knowledge. Hopefully with all this information, you will always be able to have someone with whom you can talk.

### People willing to talk

*Included here are twenty one individuals who are ready and willing to talk.*

#### **Katie Hochstedler**

Mennonite  
LGBTQ young adult  
Located in the US  
katie.hochstedler@gmail.com

#### **Judy Miller**

Brethren  
Parent of LGBTQ  
Located in the US  
judyllynnsnider@yahoo.com

#### **Josih Hostetler**

Brethren  
LGBTQ young adult  
Located in the US  
jthostetler@yahoo.com

#### **Calvin Neufeld**

Mennonite  
LGBTQ young adult  
Interest in gender identity and  
transgender rights  
Located in Canada  
calvin.neufeld@hotmail.com

#### **Dwayne Hess**

Mennonite  
LGBTQ  
Located in the US  
dwayne.hess@juno.com

**Maggie Miller**

Brethren  
LGBTQ young adult  
Interest in gender identity  
Located in the US  
maggie.hope.miller@gmail.com

**Luke Miller**

Mennonite  
LGBTQ young adult  
Interest in theology and ex-gay ministries  
Located in the US  
lukemiller@yahoo.com

**Susanna Farahat**

Brethren  
LGBTQ young adult  
Located in the US  
susanna.farahat@gmail.com

**Joyce Stoltzfus**

Brethren  
Friend to LGBTQ  
Former Church of the Brethren pastor  
Chaplain, Hospice of Lancaster County  
Located in the US  
mightyfus@comcast.net

**LaVonne & Joe Blowers**

Mennonite  
Parents of LGBTQ  
Located in the US  
jblowers@ix.netcom.com

**Rebecca & Victor Fast**

Mennonite  
Parents of LGBTQ  
Located in Canada  
rvfast@rogers.com

**Gail Newel**

Mennonite Brethren  
LGBTQ  
Located in the US  
gnewel@fwmg.org

**Anita Fast**

Mennonite  
LGBTQ  
Located in Canada  
fasta@telus.net

**Mike Lee-Poy and Thom Brown**

Mennonite  
LGBTQ  
Contacts for BMC Ontario  
bmcontario@yahoo.com

**David Taylor & Philip Kendall**

Mennonite  
LGBTQ young adults  
Located in the US  
davidlt@gmail.com  
philipyoderkendall@gmail.com

**Lorna & Ron Brown**

Mennonite  
Parents of LGBTQ  
Located in Canada  
brownrl@airenet.com

## Supportive Communities Network

*SCN is a network of Mennonite and Church of the Brethren communities who are publicly affirming of gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual members. This list is accessible from BMC's website.*

Calgary Inter-Mennonite  
Calgary, AB

Fellowship in Christ  
Fremont, CA

La Verne Church of the Brethren  
La Verne, CA

San Diego Church of the Brethren  
San Diego, CA

San Diego Mennonite Church  
San Diego, CA

First Mennonite Church of San Francisco  
San Francisco, CA

Arvada Mennonite Church  
Arvada, CO

Spirit of Joy Fellowship  
Arvada, CO

Boulder Mennonite Church  
Boulder, CO

Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship  
Fort Collins, CO

Koinonia Church  
Grand Junction, CO

Ames Mennonite Church  
Ames, IA

Chicago Community Mennonite Church  
Chicago, IL

Highland Ave. Church of the Brethren  
Elgin, IL

Voices for an Open Spirit  
Elgin, IL

Evanston Mennonite Church  
Evanston, IL

York Center Church of the Brethren  
Lombard, IL

First Church of the Brethren  
Springfield, IL

Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren  
Fort Wayne, IN

Christian Community  
Fort Wayne, IN

Inclusion Team  
from Assembly Mennonite church  
Goshen, IN

Goshen Area Connecting Families  
Goshen, IN

Emerging Welcomers  
from Turkey Creek Church of the Brethren  
Nappanee, IN

Manchester Church of the Brethren  
North Manchester, IN

Rainbow Mennonite Church  
Kansas City, KS

Peace Mennonite Church  
Lawrence, KS

Seekers Sunday Class  
from Bethel College Mennonite Church  
North Newton, KS

Mennonite Congregation of Boston  
Cambridge, MA

Dundalk Church of the Brethren  
Baltimore, MD

Columbia United Christian Church  
Columbia, MD

Lansing First Church of the Brethren  
Lansing, MI

Skyridge Church of the Brethren  
Kalamazoo, MI

Open Circle Church of the Brethren  
Burnsville, MN

Common Spirit Church of the Brethren  
Minneapolis, MN

Faith Mennonite Church  
Minneapolis, MN

St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship  
St. Paul, MN

St. John's Mennonite Fellowship  
St. John's NL

Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship

Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Interests (BMC)  
PO Box 6300  
Minneapolis MN 55406

Office hours 9-5 Monday - Friday  
612-343-2060  
bmc@bmcglt.org  
www.bmcglt.org

New York, NY  
Ontario Parent's Group  
London, ON

Church of the Brethren Womaen's Caucus  
Portland, OR

Peace Church of the Brethren  
Portland, OR

Springfield Church of the Brethren  
Springfield, OR

Welcoming Dialogue Group  
Litiz, PA

The Wider Circle  
from Palmyra Church of the Brethren  
Palmyra, PA

Germantown Mennonite Church  
Philadelphia, PA

University Baptist and Brethren  
State College, PA

Broad St. Mennonite Church  
Harrisonburg, VA

Christian Church Uniting UCC/CoB  
Virginia Beach, VA

Seattle Mennonite Church  
Seattle, WA

Maple Avenue Mennonite Church  
Waukesha, WI

## Resources

*While there's a lot of information and resources out there related to LGBTQ people and issues that affect our lives, sometimes it's hard to know where to start, or where to look. Below are a few ideas. If you're interested in more, or would like to suggest your favorites, just email us.*

### Websites - faith based

**Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests <[www.bmclgbt.org](http://www.bmclgbt.org)>**

*BMC provides programming, support and advocacy for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals and their families and friends in the Mennonite and Brethren traditions.*

**The Church of the Brethren <[www.brethren.org](http://www.brethren.org)>**

*The official website for the Church of the Brethren.*

**The Institute for Welcoming Resources <[www.welcomingresources.org](http://www.welcomingresources.org)>**

*The purpose of this ecumenical group is to provide the resources to facilitate a paradigm shift in multiple denominations whereby churches become welcoming and affirming of all congregants regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.*

**Mennonite Church Canada <[www.mennonitechurch.ca](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca)>**

*The official website of Mennonite Church Canada.*

**Mennonite Church USA <[www.mennonitechurch.org](http://www.mennonitechurch.org)>**

*The official website of Mennonite Church U.S.A.*

### Websites - youth specific

**Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (U.S.) <[www.colage.org](http://www.colage.org)>**

*COLAGE is a national movement of children, youth, and adults with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer (LGBTQ) parent/s. We build community and work toward social justice through youth empowerment, leadership development, education, and advocacy.*

**Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (U.S.) <[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)>**

*GLSEN strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.*

**National Youth Advocacy Coalition (U.S.) <[www.nyacyouth.org](http://www.nyacyouth.org)>**

*The National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC) is a social justice organization that advocates for and with young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) in an effort to end discrimination against these youth and to ensure their physical and emotional well-being.*

**The Safe Schools Coalition <[www.safeschoolscoalition.org](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org)>**

*The Safe Schools Coalition is an international public-private partnership in support of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth, that is working to help schools - at home and all over the world - become safe places where every family can belong, where every educator can teach, and where every child can learn, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.*

**The Trevor Project (U.S.) <[www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)>**

*The Trevor Project operates the only accredited, nationwide, around-the-clock crisis and suicide prevention helpline for LGBTQ youth.*

## **Websites - other**

**American Civil Liberties Union <[www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)>**

*The mission of ACLU includes four basic aspects: First Amendment rights, right to equal protection under the law, right to due process, and right to privacy.*

**Canadians for Equal Marriage <[www.equal-marriage.ca](http://www.equal-marriage.ca)>**

*Canadians for Equal Marriage is a nation-wide campaign working at the grassroots, in the media, in Parliament, and beyond, to persuade MPs to oppose any measures to take away equal marriage.*

**Canadian Human Rights Commission <[www.chrc-ccdp.ca/default-en.asp](http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/default-en.asp)>**

*The Canadian Human Rights Commission administers the Canadian Human Rights Act and is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Employment Equity Act. Both laws ensure that the principles of equal opportunity and non-discrimination are followed in all areas of federal jurisdiction.*

**Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition <[www.rainbowhealth.ca](http://www.rainbowhealth.ca)>**

*CRHC is a community-based movement dedicated to improving the emotional, physical, spiritual and mental health and wellness of people who have experienced significant inequities based on our sexual orientation and/or gender identity.*

**Egale Canada <[www.egale.ca](http://www.egale.ca)>**

*Egale Canada is a national organization that advances equality and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans-identified people and their families across Canada.*

**Human Rights Campaign <[www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)>**

*The Human Rights Campaign is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender equality.*

**Intersex Society of North America <[www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org)>**

*The Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) is devoted to systemic change to end shame, secrecy, and unwanted genital surgeries for people born with an anatomy that someone decided is not standard for male or female.*

**National Center for Transgender Equality (U.S.) <[www.transequality.org](http://www.transequality.org)>**

*The NCTE is a social justice organization dedicated to advancing the equality of transgender people through advocacy, collaboration and empowerment.*

**Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays <[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)>**

*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. PFLAG provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.*

**Soul Force (U.S.) <[www.soulforce.org](http://www.soulforce.org)>**

*Soul Force works for freedom for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people from religious and political oppression through the practice of relentless nonviolent resistance.*

**The World Professional Association for Transgender Health <[www.wpath.org](http://www.wpath.org)>**

*As an international interdisciplinary, professional organization, the mission of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) is to further the understanding and treatment of gender identity disorders by professionals in medicine, psychology, law, social work, counseling, psychotherapy, family studies, sociology, anthropology, sexology, speech and voice therapy, and other related fields.*

## **Books**

Brown, Timothy and Leanne McCall Tigert, Eds. [Coming Out Young and Faithful](#). Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001.

Clapp, Steve, Kristen Leverton Helbert, and Angela Zizak. [Faith Matters: Teenagers, Religion and Sexuality](#). Fort Wayne, IN: LifeQuest Publications, 2003.

Clapp, Steve. [The Gift of Sexuality: Empowerment for Religious Teens](#). Fort Wayne, IN: LifeQuest Publications, 2006.

Gray, Mary F. ed. [In Your Face: Stories from the Lives of Queer Youth](#). Binghamton, NY: Hayworth Press, 1999.

Huegel, Kelly, ed. [GLBTO: The Survival Guide for Queer & Questioning Teens](#). Minneapolis: Free Spirit, 2003.

King, Michael A., Ed. [Stumbling Towards a Genuine Conversation On Homosexuality](#). Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

McDougall, Bryce ed. [My Child Is Gay: How Parents React When They Hear the News](#). Crows Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2006.

Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey. [Omnigender: a Trans-Religious Approach](#). Pilgrim Press, 2007.

Rogers, Jack. [Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church](#). Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Sanchez, Alex. [The God Box](#). New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007.

Showalter Kreider, Roberta. The Cost of Truth: Faith Stories of Mennonite and Brethren Leaders and Those Who Might Have Been. Strategic Press, 2004.

Wills, Gary. What Jesus Meant. Penguin Group, 2007.

Wittlinger, Ellen. Parrotfish. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007.

## Movies

All God's Children. Dir. Dee Mosbacher and Frances Reid. 2001.

*Prominent religious, intellectual, and political leaders, family members and activists speak out about the role of the Church and the importance of commitment to equal rights and social justice for all people.*

Big Eden. Dir. Thomas Bezucha. 2000. Wolfe Video, 2000.

Henry, a successful artist from New York returns to his small home town to care for his ailing grandfather. Once home, Henry must come to terms with his relationship to his best friend from high school.

Camp Out. Dir. Larry Grimaldi and Kirk Marcolina. 2006.

*10 Midwestern teenagers attend a summer camp for gay Christian youth.*

De Colores. Dir. Peter Barbosa and Garrett Lenoir. Eyebite Productions, 2001.

*Coming out in Hispanic families is explored from the points of view the families as well as those coming out.*

For the Bible Tells Me So. Dir. Daniel G. Karlake. Atticus Group, 2007.

*The stories of five Christian families who have a gay child.*

The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community: Before Stonewall. Dir. Greta Schiller and Robert Rosenberg. First Run Features, 1984.

*A history of the gay community before the Stonewall riots of 1969.*

In My Shoes: Stories of Youth with LGBT Parents. Dir. Jennifer Gilomen. Frameline, 2007.

*A youth-produced documentary film by and about children of LGBT parents.*

Milk. Dir. Gus Van Sant. Focus Features, 2008.

*The story of Harvey Milk, his struggles as an American gay activist who fought for gay rights and became California's first openly gay elected official.*

Prayers for Bobby. Dir. Russell Mulcahy. TV. Daniel Sladek Entertainment, 2009.

*The story of Mary Griffith and her struggles to accept her gay son.*

Transgeneration. Dir. Jeremy Simmons. Logo Entertainment, 2005.

*An eight part documentary series about four transgender college students.*

## Brethren and Mennonite Colleges and Universities

*Although some are difficult to find, all Brethren and Mennonite Colleges and Universities have LGBTQ groups in some form.*

Throughout the U.S. and Canada, there are 13 Colleges and/or Universities affiliated with the Church of the Brethren or Mennonite Church. You may wonder... how accepting are these schools of LGBTQ students? In 2004, Kaleidoscope Coordinator Josih Hostetler created a research plan to survey that question and more. This project, *The Kaleidoscope LGBT Continuum of Care*, reports the finding from the seven institutions willing to participate. Nine colleges or universities chose not to participate in the study.

### Included in the study:

Conrad Grebel University College  
Elizabethtown College  
Hesston College  
Juniata College  
The University of La Verne  
Manchester College  
McPherson College

### Not included in the study:

Bethel College  
Bluffton University  
Bridgewater College  
Canadian Mennonite University  
Eastern Mennonite University  
Goshen College

### Conrad Grebel University College

[www.grebel.uwaterloo.ca](http://www.grebel.uwaterloo.ca)  
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada  
Mennonite

**73% LGBT Affirming**

### Elizabethtown College

[www.etown.edu](http://www.etown.edu)  
Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania  
Church of the Brethren

**59% LGBT Affirming**

### Hesston College

[www.hesston.edu](http://www.hesston.edu)  
Hesston, Kansas  
Mennonite

**46% LGBT Affirming**

**Juniata College**

www.juniata.edu  
Huntingdon, Pennsylvania  
Church of the Brethren

**70% LGBT Affirming**

**University of La Verne**

www.ulv.edu  
La Verne, California  
Church of the Brethren

**79% LGBT Affirming**

**Manchester College**

www.manchester.edu  
North Manchester, Indiana  
Church of the Brethren

**72% LGBT Affirming**

**McPherson College**

www.mcpherson.edu  
McPherson, Kansas  
Church of the Brethren

**63% LGBT Affirming**

*Not included in the study:*

Bethel College <i>www.bethelks.edu</i>	Mennonite
Bluffton University <i>www.bluffton.edu</i>	Mennonite
Bridgewater College <i>www.bridgewater.edu</i>	Church of the Brethren
Canadian Mennonite University <i>www.cmu.ca</i>	Mennonite
Eastern Mennonite University <i>www.emu.edu</i>	Mennonite
Goshen College <i>www.goshen.edu</i>	Mennonite

*The "Kaleidoscope LGBT Continuum of Care" is printed in full on our website.  
For more information on any of the colleges or universities listed, please contact the BMC office.*

## A Few Definitions

**LGBTQ:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning.

**Lesbian:** A person who identifies as a woman who is emotionally, spiritually, physically and/or sexually attracted primarily to other women.

**Gay:** A person who identifies as a man who is emotionally, spiritually, physically and/or sexually attracted primarily to other men. Gay, however is often used as an umbrella term for both same-gender loving men and women, and many women identify as gay rather than, or in addition to, lesbian.

**Bisexual:** A person who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted to those of any sex or gender.

**Ally:** A non-LGBT person who works in solidarity with other heterosexual people and with the LGBTQ community to aid in the struggle against hate, discrimination, and the heterosexist and patriarchal norms present in our culture. Being an ally means: sharing the power, taking a risk, taking responsibility, opening yourself up to the unknown, realizing that you are part of the solution, leveling the playing field, accepting differences, making allowances, and leading by action. It is important for an ally to join LGBT persons in solidarity, and not play a patronizing role in the journey towards equality.

**Gender identity:** Describe the gender with which a person identifies (i.e, whether on perceives oneself to be a man, a woman, or describes oneself in some less conventional way), but can also be used to refer to the gender that other people attribute to the individual on the basis of what they know from gender role indications (clothing, hair style, *et cetera*). Gender identity may be affected by a variety of social structures, including the person's ethnic position, employment status, religion or irreligion, and family.

**Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity is different from the sex and gender role they were assigned at birth. Transgender people can be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and may not identify as queer.

