

# GIFTS FROM GOD

## Spirituality and Sexuality

*A Contemplative Approach to Spirituality and Sexuality*

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RESOURCE GUIDE

The development of this workbook has been funded by a grant  
from the Episcopal Evangelism Society



## RESOURCE GUIDE

### Introduction

Spirituality and sexuality are intricately connected, infinitely complex, and both are gifts from God. In the second commandment, Jesus taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:3). Among people—particularly in faith communities—no other topic provokes such heated debate as sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Many adopt a “don’t ask, don’t tell” attitude regarding this subject in both teaching and practice.

Resources are being developed by The Episcopal Church (TEC) to offer ways to discuss the often “taboo” subjects of sex, sexuality, spirituality, and the impact of The Episcopal Church’s position on the theology of marriage on faith and sexuality. These resources often take the form of foundation books, program modules, and manuals (e.g., *These Are Our Bodies*). We believe that by drawing upon the rich resources of Christian contemplative tradition, there is a way to influence one’s own interior life and spiritual practice for this topic and be able to personally connect through “holy listening.”

As we spread the good news of the Gospel, we envision this tent for our neighbors as both deep and broad, including all—irrespective of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, age, culture, country of origin, or ability. Contemplative spiritual direction is a way in for everyone to discuss issues of faith and sexuality, all grounded in God’s grace and love. To that end, we have developed a workbook for spiritual directors, seminarians, clergy, lay leaders, and community partners. The development of the workbook has been funded by the **Episcopal Evangelism Society** (EES).

Jesus declares, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28 KJV). Join us as we engage in healthy and honest discussions around spirituality and sexuality. We will not attempt to convince one another to adopt any view but rather offer a safe and sacred space to share knowledge, and to engage in open and honest dialogue. This workbook will offer support to enter into your own interior life by providing guided meditation and prayer, journaling exercises, periods of silence and reflection, education, and resources. The workbook may be used individually, in small group discussions, or as a one day retreat.

It is our hope that through pertinent prayer and an open heart, you will engage in this vulnerable journey to discussing sexuality and spiritually with those we love.

May the mystery of your sexuality continue to be a gift from God.

*WESTINA MATTHEWS*

*TOMMIE WATKINS*

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## RESOURCE GUIDE

**Title:** A Contemplative Approach to Spirituality and Sexuality

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Tuscaloosa Alabama, and Adjunct Professor at the University of Alabama School of Social Work.

### Description

A Contemplative Approach to Spirituality and Sexuality is a dynamic, contemplative approach which draws upon the rich resources of Christian contemplative tradition to influence one's own interior life and spiritual practice to address issues of sexuality, sexuality orientation, and spirituality. This workbook is offered in a format to enhance the capacity of participants (spiritual directors, clergy, lay leaders, community partners, parishioners, etc.) to discuss issues of faith and sexuality. The outline provides: guided meditation and prayer; journaling exercises; periods of silence and reflection; education; interactive sharing; group spiritual direction; additional resources; and suggested formats for delivery.

This workbook was field tested as a one-day retreat for parishioners and the community at Trinity Wall Street, New York, NY in October 2016 and offered as a three-day intensive practicum for seminarians at General Theological Seminary, New York, NY in March 2017.

### Theological Premise

This resource provides a healthy alternative to didactic teaching which tells others what we believe is truth; and will allow participants to work within God's parameters to create the change of heart needed to see all persons as equal. The workbook provides a unique opportunity, maybe for the first time, for persons to address issues of sexuality and spirituality irrespective of one's own sexual orientation. We believe that this enterprise offers a non-threatening environment and process to work towards overcoming a very visible and salient barrier attributed to issues of sexuality, which can allow one to achieve wholeness and wholesome reconciliation as evidenced by inclusion and diversity for all of God's children.

### Goals

- To introduce and facilitate open and frank conversation about sexuality using guidelines and principles of spiritual direction (e.g., examining resistance, "holy listening," integrating pastoral care, etc.).
- To educate, discuss, and provide accurate definitions of sex, sexualities, and gender identification.
- To provide innovative practical tools for Christian leaders (clergy, lay, community, spiritual directors) to facilitate healthy and holistic conversations around faith and sexuality.

### Target Audience: Adults

The workbook may be used by individuals, in small or larger groups with adults. Gender diversity is encouraged, including LBGQT+ and cisgender if possible and appropriate.

## **Delivery and Implementation**

The workbook is available electronically with no cost.

## **Timing**

The contents may be delivered in workshops, seminars, one-day or weekend retreats, or as adult forums (1 to 6 sessions). You may wish to introduce the workbook, and offer it as independent study over several weeks, reconvening after two weeks and then with a final session.

## **Suggested Language to Market**

### **Gifts from God: Spirituality and Sexuality**

Spirituality and sexuality are intricately connected and both are gifts from God. Among people—particularly in faith communities—no other topic provokes such heated debate as sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Join us as we engage in healthy and honest discussions around spirituality and sexuality. We will not attempt to convince one another to adopt any view but rather offer a safe and sacred space to share knowledge, and to engage in open and honest dialogue. This contemplative approach will offer support to enter into your own interior life by providing guided meditation and prayer, journaling exercises, periods of silence and reflection, education, interactive sharing, and resources.

## **Design and Flow**

While the time together will be full of rich content, there may not be sufficient time to cover the entire content of the workbook. Allow time for moments of contemplative pause to deepen the time together. Encourage attendees to complete the workbook on their own.

We encourage you to use music, a candle, a singing bowl, essential oils, and any other contemplative practices which will help the group to center and thereby creating a safe and sacred space for conversation.

A flipchart with markers will be needed, as well as pencils and pens. Because attendees will be journaling, you may wish for them to be seated at small round tables. Another seating possibility is to have everyone in a semi-circle with chairs for easy moving into small group discussions; with spaces available for individuals to go off to journal alone.

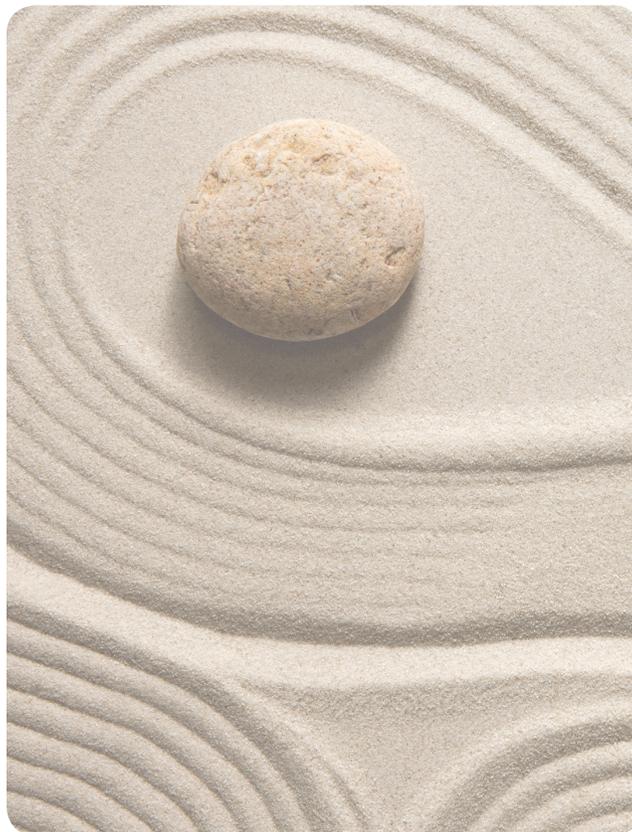
You may choose to offer this in one hour sessions. Because there will not be sufficient time to cover the entire content of the workbook in an hour setting, we suggest you offer a six-part series (one hour each). Rather than distribute the entire notebook, you may wish to photocopy only the exercises for that particular session. During each session, allow time for moments of contemplative pause to deepen the time together. Encourage attendees to continue on their own between sessions.

### **Journaling Guidelines**

Participants may wish to write in this workbook, copy pages and write on the copies, or write in their own personal journals. Encourage participants to use whatever is their spiritual practice and what is most comfortable for them. If there is large or small group discussion, remind participants that they should only share that which they wish to share and how the Holy Spirit moves them.

### **Evaluation**

A suggested evaluation is provided which can be distributed at the end of the retreat or forum, or you may wish to send electronically to be completed. In order to encourage honest and candid feedback, we recommend that the evaluations be anonymous.



## SUGGESTED ONE DAY RETREAT OUTLINE

**9:30 a.m. Arrival/Registration/Coffee**

**10:00 a.m. Centering/Welcome/Introduction**

- The Guest House centering meditation
- *Why are you here? What do you hope to get out of today?*  
*Find one person to share; then in large group each person calls out one hope, write on flip chart*

**10:25 a.m. Exercises I and II**

- Review Journaling/Reflection guidelines found in workbook
- Your Natural Predisposition
- Have individuals indicate on the arrow where they think they are for each set; go over list with entire group, asking people to raise their hands if they were more one than the other or neutral as you read them out loud. Discuss how this can affect the conversation for the day.
- Mark 12:24-38 *How might this scripture be relevant for our time together today?*
- Discussion

**10:45 a.m. Exercise III The Senses**

- Allow 10 minutes to complete exercise in silence; encourage them to write down the first thing that comes to mind without judgment, and then to answer the journaling questions
- Large group discussion for anything anyone wishes to share
- Transition with the Blessing on the Senses

**11:00 a.m. Break**

**11:15 a.m. Exercise IV, V, VI, Did You Know?**

- Introduce that the next hour will be for them to do internal work
- Read aloud with group Exercises IV, V, VI
- instruct quiet time for them to complete on their own

**12:15 p.m. Lunch**

- You may wish to have the attendees to gather in small groups to discuss Exercise VI (Passion and Compassion)

## SUGGESTED ONE DAY RETREAT OUTLINE Contd.

**1:00 p.m. Large Group Facilitated Discussion**

- *What are some of the new insights or learnings that you have gleaned from this morning?*
- *What is the difference between passion and compassion? How are they similar?*
- *What is the difference between welcoming and affirming?*

**1:30 p.m. Exercise VIII The Intersectionality of All God's Children**

- Introduce the Venn Diagram and Discussion Questions
- Break into small groups to discuss

**2:00 p.m. Exercise IX Bringing Your Authentic Self to God**

- Read aloud *The Wholesome Sexuality*
- Allow time for individuals to journal questions

**2:30 p.m. Preparing to Close**

- Pass out Post-It Notes and ask participants to write down a word or phrase that would make it possible for them to have a more authentic relationship with God and with others
- When finished writing, bring up post-it-note and place on flip charts
- Read aloud the responses
- Go back to the “hopes” from this morning and read aloud. Ask if any of these hopes were met

**2:40 p.m. Closing Meditation**

Loving-Kindness Metta

## SUGGESTED ADULT FORUMS FORMAT (Six Sessions)

- SESSION ONE**      Exercise I: Your Natural Predisposition  
                          Exercise II: Reflection
- SESSION TWO**     Exercise III: The Five Senses
- SESSION THREE**   Exercise IV: The Bible and Sex  
                          Exercise V: Christianity and Sex
- SESSION FOUR**    Exercise VI: Passion and Compassion  
                          Did You Know?
- SESSION FIVE**    Exercise VII: Religion and Spirituality  
                          Exercise VIII: The Intersectionality of All God's Children
- SESSION SIX**     Exercise IX: Bringing Your Authentic Self to God

### **Format**

- Leader:**
- Opening Prayer, Meditation, or Reflection
  - 2 Minutes of Silence to gather the hearts into a common desire for God
  - Introduction of Topic
  - Review Journaling/Reflection Guidelines
- Response:**
- Allow time for journaling before large or small group discussion
  - Group leader encourages trust of God's loving care for each presenter
  - Sharing/Discussion
- Silence:**
- Silence for 1-2 minutes at end of discussion to allow time for God to cut through the limits of biases and accustomed ways of responding, to listen "with the ear of the heart"
- Closing:**
- Closing Prayer, Meditation, or Reflection offered by Leader

## SUGGESTED ADULT FORUMS FORMAT (Three Sessions)

This Adult Forum can be offered over a six-week period, with only three minutes. Individuals are encouraged to read the assigned materials and journal between sessions. You may choose to distribute entire workbook or only assigned pages.

### SESSION ONE

#### Centering/Welcome/Introduction

- The Guest House centering meditation
- *Why are you here? What do you hope to get out of today?*  
*Find one person to share; then in large group each person calls out one hope, write on flip chart*

#### Exercises I

- Your Natural Predisposition
- Have individuals indicate on the arrow where they think they are for each set; go over list with entire group, asking people to raise their hands if they were more one than the other or neutral as you read them out loud. Discuss how this can affect the discussions.
- Mark 12:24-38 *How might this scripture be relevant for our time together today?*
- Discussion
- Review Journaling/Reflection Guidelines

#### Assign

- Exercise II: Reflection
- Exercise III: The Five Senses
- Exercise IV The Bible and Sex

#### Closing Meditation

*Where We Are*, by Margaret Silf

### SESSION TWO

#### Large or Small Group Discussions

In large or small groups (depending on number in attendance) discuss:

- *What are some of the new insights or learnings that you have gleaned from this morning?*
- *What is the difference between passion and compassion? How are they similar?*
- *What is the difference between welcoming and affirming?*

#### Assign

- Exercise V: Christianity and Sex
- Exercise VI: Passion and Compassion

## SUGGESTED ADULT FORUMS FORMAT Contd. (Three Sessions)

### SESSION TWO

#### **Assign**

- Did You Know?
- Exercise VII: Religion and Spirituality
- Exercise VIII: The Intersectionality of All God's Children

#### **Closing Meditation**

- *Prayer to the God of Abraham*, by Elie Wiesel

### SESSION THREE

#### **Exercise IX Bringing Your Authentic Self to God**

- Ask each person to share a new insight or learning
- Read aloud *The Wholesome Sexuality*
- Allow time for individuals to journal question

#### **Preparing to Close**

- Pass out Post-It Notes and ask participants to write down a word or phrase that would make it possible for them to have a more authentic relationship with God and with others
- When finished, invite participants to bring up Post-It Notes and place on flip charts
- Read aloud the responses

#### **Closing Meditation**

- Loving-Kindness Metta



## EVALUATION

### Gifts from God: Spirituality and Sexuality

#### *A Contemplative Approach to Spirituality and Sexuality*

1. What has been the most helpful in terms of:

Content

Process

Leadership

2. Do you think anything could have been done differently (add, eliminate, substitute, change)?

3. Was there anything that was especially meaningful that might influence you in the way you are able to think about spirituality and sexuality?

4. Did the time together meet your expectations? Explain.

5. What was the high point for you?

6. Were there any other topics that you would have liked to discuss? If so, please provide.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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[http://www.sgm.org.nz/uploads/2/0/1/6/20165561/whisperings\\_of\\_intimacy\\_-\\_jo\\_anastadiadis.pdf](http://www.sgm.org.nz/uploads/2/0/1/6/20165561/whisperings_of_intimacy_-_jo_anastadiadis.pdf)

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McMinn, Lisa Graham. *Sexuality and Holy Longing: Embracing Intimacy in a Broken World*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2004. ISBN-13: 978-0787968182

May, Gerald. "Contemplative Spiritual Formation: an Introduction," Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, 2001. <https://shalem.org/2004/03/01/what-is-contemplative-spirituality/>

Rositer, Rich. *Spiritual Direction with Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Persons*, Chapter Six, pp. 77 – 92. In Vest, Norvene, ed. *Still Listening: New Horizons in Spiritual Direction*. Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 2000. ISBN-10: 0819218146.

Ruffing, Janet. "Flesh Is More than Flesh: Sexuality and Spirituality in Spiritual Direction," Chapter Twelve, pp. 171 – 182. In Vest, Norvene, ed. *Still Listening: New Horizons in Spiritual Direction*. Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 2000. ISBN-10: 0819218146.

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Wills, Garry. *What Jesus Meant*. New York. Viking Books. 2006



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES Contd.

### **Episcopal Church Resources on Marriage**

*For those who are interested in exploring further the position of the Episcopal Church on Marriage, the following resources may be of interest:*

Report from the Marriage Task Force of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church  
<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/12485.pdf>

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**DR. WESTINA MATTHEWS**, Adjunct Professor, General Theological Seminary, is an author, public speaker, retreat leader, and spiritual director. A contemplative spiritual director whose practice reflects contemplative living through “holy listening”, Westina is a graduate of the spiritual guidance program at Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation. She earned her doctorate in education from the University of Chicago; and has completed postdoctoral fellowships at Northwestern University, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. For many years, Westina was a lay leader of Trinity Church Wall Street in New York City, where she served on the vestry and co-led the parish’s annual offering of Commitment to Discipleship. The author of three books in the *Have A Little Faith* series, Westina also has contributed to several Forward Movement anthologies. Westina is married and is the proud mother of a daughter and two adorable grandchildren.

**THE REV. DR. TOMMIE LEE WATKINS JR.**, is the Associate Rector and Assistant Chaplain at Canterbury Chapel, Tuscaloosa Alabama, and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Alabama School of Social Work. Rev. Watkins also is a spiritual director, behavioral scientist, social worker, former mathematics professor and commercial pilot. He earned his MSW from the University of Alabama, his PhD in the School of Health, University of Alabama, and his M.Div. from The General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church. Because of the gaps in resources and research among Black “non-heterosexual” identified males, Rev. Watkins was driven to complete a Ph.D. degree to become a researcher primarily concerned with the role that religion and spirituality plays in health outcomes among Black gay/bi-sexual males. He is the author of *Living Out Loud* in which he shares his struggle of self-acceptance as an openly gay clergy.