

GIFTS FROM GOD

Spirituality and Sexuality

A Contemplative Approach to Spirituality and Sexuality

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



SPIRITUALITY AND SEXUALITY

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

August 2017



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Journaling Instructions:

You may wish to write in this workbook, copy pages and write on the copies, or write in your own journal. Use whatever is your spiritual practice and what is most comfortable for you.



JOURNAL GUIDELINES

Guidelines for Journaling and Shared Reflections

1. Before journaling, begin with a few moments in silence, letting your mind be open to your spiritual heart, open for God.
2. Journal prayerfully, in response to the reflection questions, sharing from your prayer and your spiritual heart. This journaling is just for you, and it may take many forms.
3. Discern prayerfully, as you read what you have written, discern what from your journal you may want to share with others.
4. Listen prayerfully to what others are journaling, letting their words be heard by your spiritual heart. Receive each other's words without judgment.
5. Respond prayerfully, continuing the sharing as seems called for. Try not to fix, analyze or debate. Use open—ended questions (i.e. questions to which you do not know the answer) that might draw the person and/or the group more deeply into their experience. You could also build on the sharing, noting common themes.
6. Commit to confidentiality. All sharing is kept in confidence within this group.
7. Conclude prayerfully, with a few moments of silence, silently praying for the whole group.

School of Contemplative Prayer

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BEFORE WE BEGIN

What brings you to this topic? What are your hopes?

OPENING MEDITATION

Read aloud or silently Rumi's "*The Guest House*."

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes.
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Jellaludin Rumi
translation by Coleman Banks

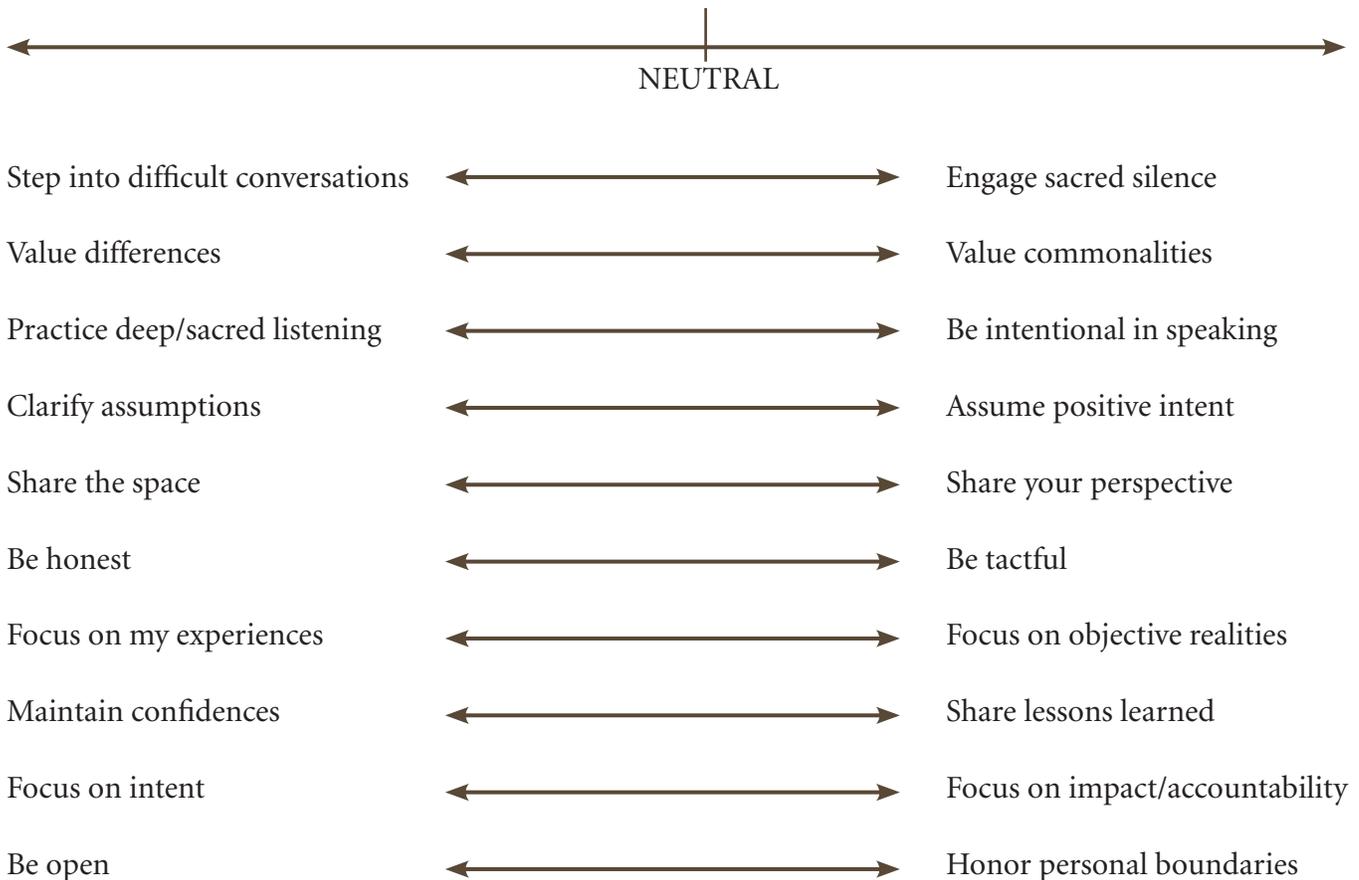
JOURNALING/REFLECTION

How did the description of the guest house connect with your own experiences of being human?



I. YOUR NATURAL PREDISPOSITION

As you read across each line, where would you fall for each pair that describes where you typically are?



Trinity Institute 2016 conference, Listen for a Change: Sacred Conversations for Racial Justice, Trinity Wall Street, New York City, January 21-23, 2016.

JOURNALING/REFLECTION

What are the implications of your predisposition for our work together?

How might you be able to deepen your “holy listening” and be open to other points of view?



II. REFLECTION

Read the following scripture passage silently or aloud.

Mark 12:28-34

²⁸ One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ³² Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; ³³ and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

JOURNALING/REFLECTION

What does it mean to you to love your neighbors as yourself?

How might this scripture be relevant to our topic today?

When thinking about Spirituality and Sexuality, which “word or phrase” in this scripture passage spoke to you?

Do you believe sexuality is a gift from God? Why or why not?



III. THE FIVE SENSES

Spirituality and sexuality are intricately connected, infinitely complex, and both are gifts from God. Take a few minutes to answer the following questions; write down the first thing that comes to mind:

A. Sexuality

A good sexual experience sounds like:

A good sexual experience smells like:

A good sexual experience tastes like:

A good sexual experience feels like:

A good sexual experience looks like:

B. Spirituality

A good spiritual experience sounds like:

A good spiritual experience smells like:

A good spiritual experience tastes like:

A good spiritual experience feels like:

A good spiritual experience looks like:



III. REFLECTION ON THE FIVE SENSES

JOURNALING/REFLECTION

- a) Were any of your responses the same for both sexuality and spirituality? If so, which ones?

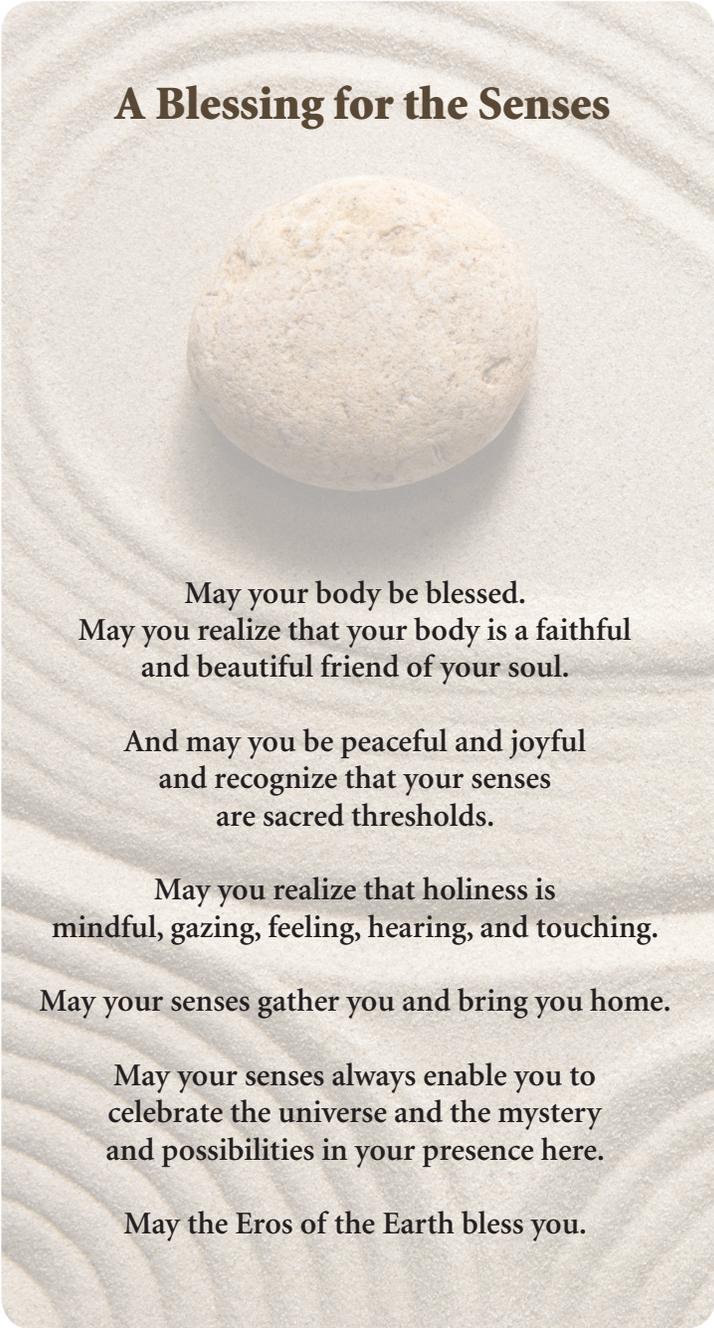
- b) When answering the questions about sexual experiences, did you mention God?
Why or why not?

- c) Were there any questions that you chose not to answer or that made you particularly uncomfortable? If so, which ones?

- d) How does the existence of sexual pleasure inform you about being made in the image of God?

- e) Have you ever experienced sexual abuse or inappropriate sexual encounters? If so, how did it affect your relationship with yourself? With others? With God?

Read aloud or silently “Blessing for the Senses” by John O’Donohue.



A Blessing for the Senses

May your body be blessed.
May you realize that your body is a faithful
and beautiful friend of your soul.

And may you be peaceful and joyful
and recognize that your senses
are sacred thresholds.

May you realize that holiness is
mindful, gazing, feeling, hearing, and touching.

May your senses gather you and bring you home.

May your senses always enable you to
celebrate the universe and the mystery
and possibilities in your presence here.

May the Eros of the Earth bless you.

*O’Donohue, John. To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings.
Doubleday; First Edition Used edition (March 4, 2008), p. 40.*



IV. THE BIBLE AND SEXUALITY

For some, the Scriptural debate on sexuality is certain and concluded. They believe Scripture is clear and prescribes and proscribes specific attitudes and behaviors relating to one's sexual orientation. Others believe that the Bible is not conclusive on sexuality and permits one to be guided by the Holy Spirit when it comes to such modern and germane issues. What do you believe?

JOURNALING/REFLECTION

Can you think of any scriptures or references to Biblical scripture that you have heard or read that refer to sex (e.g., Adam and Eve, King David and Bathsheba, the Men of Sodom)? You don't have to quote it exactly or know where exactly it's located.

Do you feel that those scripture(s) are affirming or convicting/condemning?

Can you think of any scriptures or references to Biblical scripture that you have heard or read that refer to LBGT issues? (You don't have to quote it exactly or know where exactly it's located).

Do you feel that the scripture cited is affirming or convicting/condemning?



V. CHRISTIANITY AND SEX

“The heart of Christian faith is the encounter with the God of Jesus Christ who makes possible both our union with God and communion with each other. In this encounter God invites people to share in divine life and grace through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit; at the same time, we are called to live in new relationship with one other, as we are gathered together by the Spirit into the body of Christ.”

Faith, Hope, and Love: Theological Resources for Blessing Same Sex Relationships, in “I Will Bless You, and You Will Be a Blessing,” *Liturgical Resources 1*, revised and expanded edition. New York: Church Publishing, Inc., 2015, 39-43.

JOURNALING/REFLECTION

What are the messages of the Christian ethical tradition you have received regarding sex and intimate relationships? How did it affect your relationship with yourself? With others? With God?

IN A 2014 RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE STUDY, GOOD SEX IS VIEWED AS VERY IMPORTANT FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE.

Shared interests, good sex, sharing of chores seen as keys to successful marriage

% in each group who say _____ is very important for a successful marriage

	All adults	NET ALL MARRIED adults	Both spouses affiliated w/same religion	Both affiliated, but w/different religions	One spouse affiliated, one unaffiliated	Both spouses unaffiliated	ALL UNMARRIED adults
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Having shared interests	66	64	65	68	57	64	68
Satisfying sexual relationship	63	61	63	60	57	60	65
Sharing household chores	61	56	55	57	58	62	65
Adequate income	46	42	43	40	42	41	51
Shared religious beliefs	44	47	64	24	17	16	41
Having children	41	43	51	37	32	19	39
Agreement on politics	16	16	17	16	13	13	16

Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study recontact survey conducted March 17-May 6, 2015. “One-in-Five U.S. Adults Were Raised in Interfaith Homes”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Growing up, was sex discussed openly in your household?

As an adult, how comfortable are you in discussing sex with your spouse, partner or children?



VI. PASSION AND COMPASSION

Henri Nouwen—beloved author, priest, and internationally recognized spiritual master, counselor, and guide—wrote over 40 books on the spiritual life.

“For if your compassion is born of prayer, it is born of your meeting with God who is also the God of all people.” Henri Nouwen

JOURNALING/REFLECTION

What do you think Nouwen means when he wrote that the God to whom you pray is also the God of everybody else?

What does passion mean to you? What does compassion mean to you? How might they be the same? How might they be different?

With which are you more comfortable: thinking of spirituality and sexuality as compassion or passion? Which makes you more uncomfortable? Why or why not?

How difficult is it for you to accept that the God you worship is also the God of people who have lifestyles or attitudes contrary to your own values? Why?



DID YOU KNOW?

Spirituality

In many religious traditions “spirit” refers to life-force, the basic energy of being. Symbolically, spirit is the breath of life.

May, Gerald. “Contemplative Spiritual Formation: an Introduction,” Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, 2001.

Spirituality refers to the embodied, ubiquitous, holy, authorized and inspirited entity that works in and through all of the universe—seen and unseen.

There is an increasing number of individuals who identify as spiritual but not religious (SBNR) in the US.

“Americans may be getting less religious, but feelings of spirituality are on the rise,” Pew Research Center, last modified January 21, 2016, last accessed July 26, 2017 from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/21/americans-spirituality/>

There is an increase in the number of individuals who identify with traditionally spiritual disciplines (e.g., Buddhist, Yoga).

Ibid, Pew, 2015.

The significant number of individuals who have left traditional religious communities due to discrimination experienced because of their “non-heterosexual” sexual orientation.

Ibid, Pew, 2015.

The increasing number of Millennials desire to reconcile faith and sexuality but feel excluded from religious organizations.

“Millennials Abandoning Christianity Because of Family Breakdown,” The Christian Post, last accessed July 26, 2017, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/millennials-abandoning-christianity-because-of-family-breakdown-author-says-176919/>

Understanding Sexual Expression

Sexual orientation—refers to the natural inclination and attraction to one or more sexual orientation(s), gender(s), or gender identities on an emotional, mental, and physical level.

Sexual preference—refers to the romantic attraction and partners of an individual (sexual type and/or characteristics of partner that one finds attractive, i.e., African-American, Latino(a), muscular, thin.

Sexual choice—refers to the status of expression in regards to one’s sexuality (monogamous, polygamous, married, celibate, abstinence, etc.)



DID YOU KNOW? Contd.

Understanding Sexual Expression Contd.

Sexual Identity—refers to how one self-identifies regarding their sexual orientation (e.g., poly-, pan-, homo-, or heterosexual). Often used in conjunction with gender identity (i.e., transgender or cisgender-in which gender identity and biological sex are congruent).

Gender identity—the self-expression of an individual regarding how they perform their gender (masculine, feminine, gender fluid, etc.), often thought to be a social construct or “head” concept.

Source: The Rev. Dr. Tommie Watkins, Jr., “Religion, Spirituality, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Health” (Presentation at the Breaking Down Barriers-Alabama Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers Conference, April 24, 2017).

JOURNALING/REFLECTION

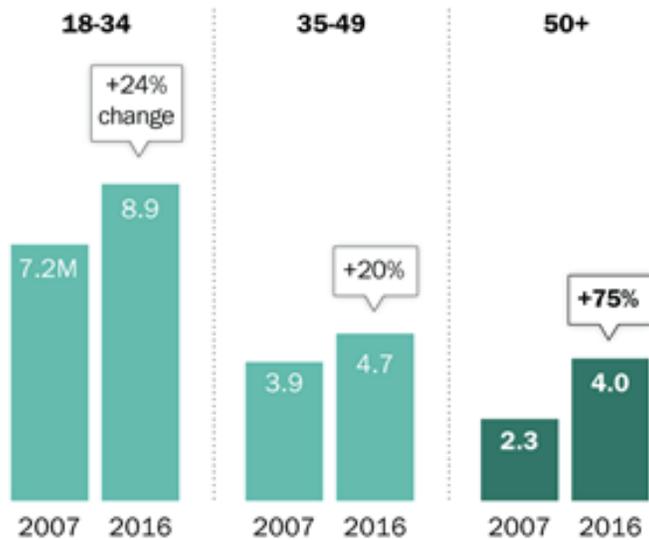
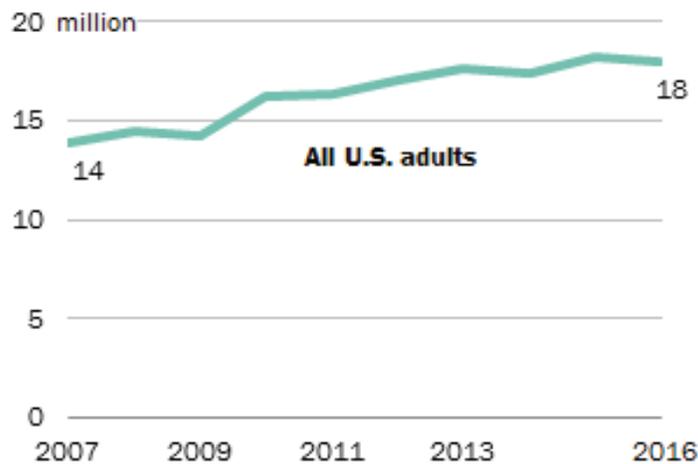


VII. RELIGION AND SEXUALITY

A. Number of Individuals Cohabiting with a Partner Continues to Rise

Since 2007, the number of cohabiting adults ages 50 and older has risen 75%

Number of persons in each age group who are cohabiting, in millions



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Table AD-3 and Pew Research Center analysis of 2007 and 2016 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements (IPUMS).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



VII. RELIGION AND SEXUALITY Contd.

A. Number of Individuals Cohabiting with a Partner Continues to Rise Contd.

JOURNALING/REFLECTION

How has your faith tradition and/or denomination influenced your perspective on cohabitation without marriage?

Do you think your church/parish has become more accepting of cohabitation without marriage?

How do you feel about “open” or “polyamorous” relationships, that is, relationships in which individuals have multiple sexual partnerships at the same time, with the consent of all involved?

How welcoming are you to those who do not share your point of view on cohabitation or “open” relationships?

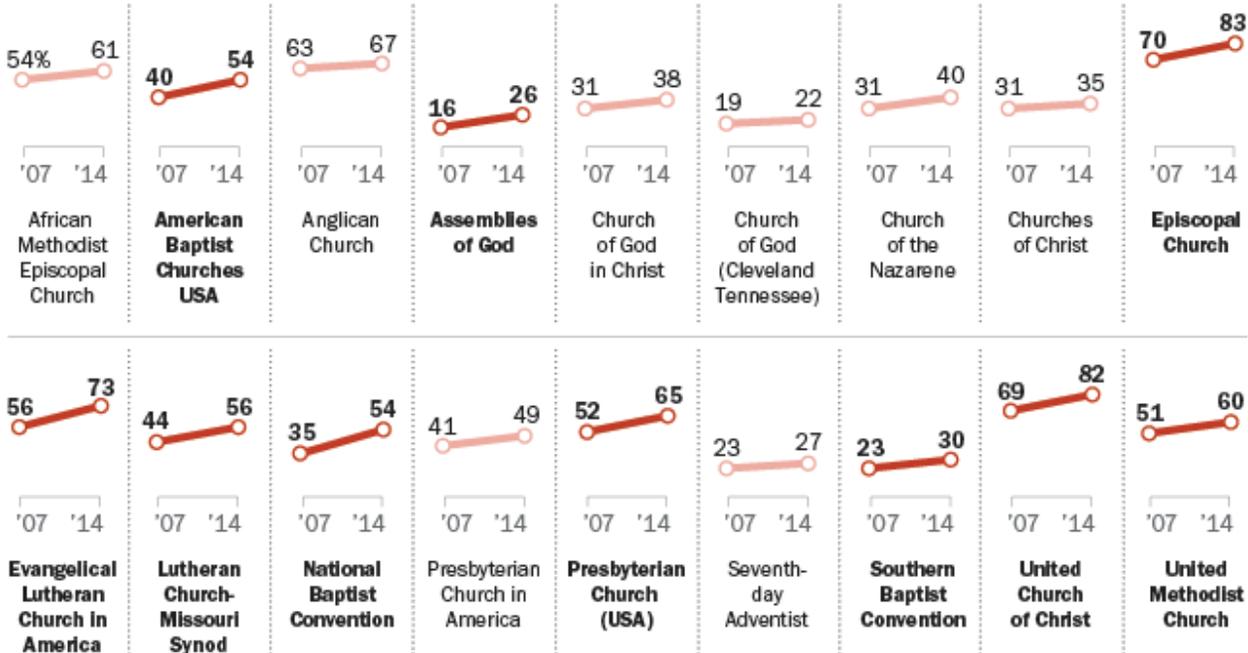


VII. RELIGION AND SEXUALITY Contd.

B. Most U.S. Protestant Groups Have Grown More Accepting of Homosexuality

Members of many Protestant denominations now more accepting of homosexuality

% saying homosexuality should be accepted by society



Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. Statistically significant change shown in bold.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

How has your faith tradition and/or denomination influenced your perspective on homosexuality?

Do you feel that your church/parish has become more accepting of homosexuality?

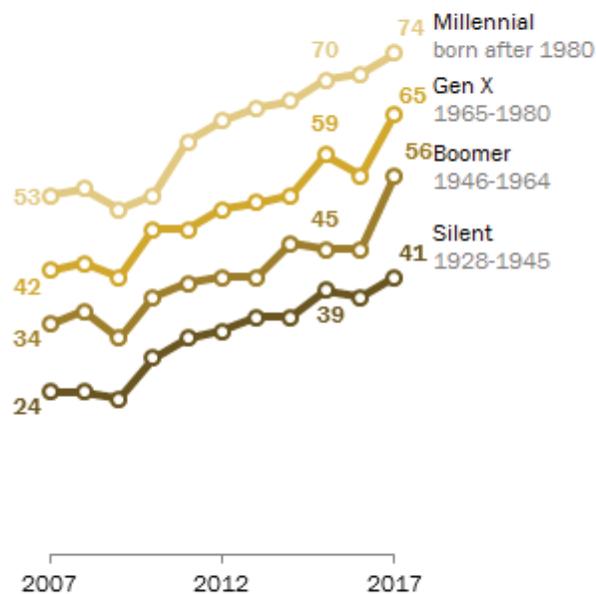


VII. RELIGION AND SEXUALITY Contd.

C. There Is Growing Support for Same-Sex Marriage

Majorities of Millennials, Gen X and Boomers now favor same-sex marriage

% who favor allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally



Note: Data for 2007-2015 based on yearly averages.
Source: Survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

JOURNALING/REFLECTION

How do you feel about same-sex marriage?

How has your faith tradition and/or denomination influenced your perspective on same-sex marriage?



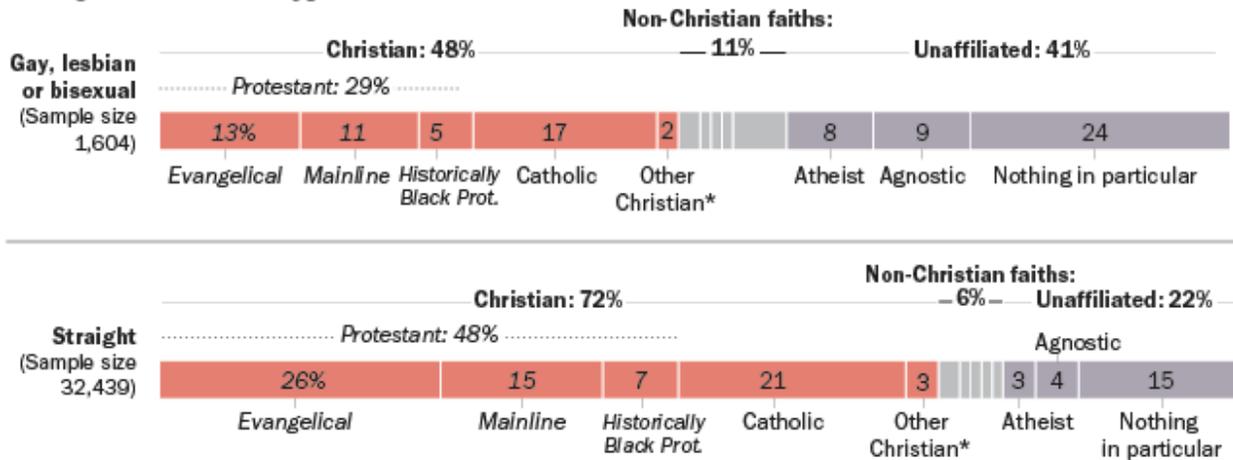
VII. RELIGION AND SEXUALITY Contd.

D. Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Americans Differ from General Public in their Religious Affiliations

Although many lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) adults feel that most major faiths are unwelcoming to their community, a majority of LGB adults are religiously affiliated. But they are much less likely to be Christian than the general public and are more drawn to smaller, non-Christian denominations.

Religious Composition by Self-Reported Sexual Identity

Among those who identify as ...



Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

"Non-Christian faiths" category includes Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and a number of other smaller, non-Christian faiths.
*Other Christian groups include Orthodox Christians, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and a number of smaller Christian groups.
Don't know/refused answers are omitted.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

JOURNALING/REFLECTION

How welcoming are you to those who do not share your point of view on sexual expression?

How welcoming is your church/parish? How affirming is your church/parish?



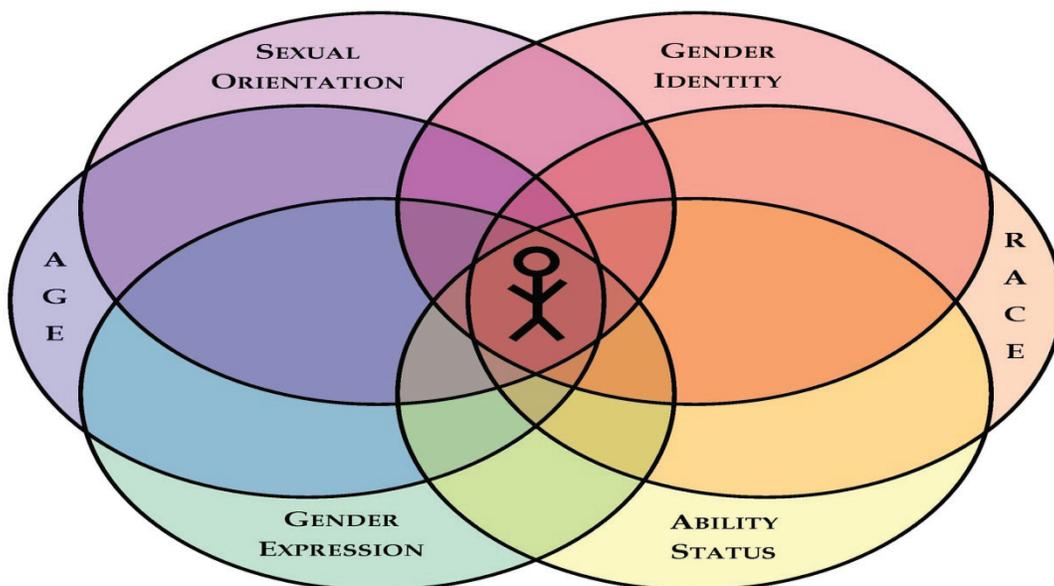
VIII. THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF ALL GOD'S CHILDREN

When you look at the diagram below, how would you describe your intersectionality?

How has your culture or ethnicity influence your thinking about gender roles?

Do you feel or have you ever felt discriminated or judged or unwelcomed for any of these characteristics?

How welcoming is your church/parish of you? How affirming is your church/parish for you?



Kirk Walter, "Safe Zone LGBTQA+ Ally Training 1.0" (Presentation to University of Alabama School of Social Work SW 351-Injustice and Oppression Class, January 31, 2017).



IX. BRINGING YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF TO GOD

Wholesome Sexuality

In *Near Occasions of Grace* (2015) Richard Rohr suggests that the Catholic Theological Society's study *Human Sexuality Research Report* (1979) summarizes quite well that "our sexual actions must aim to be self-liberating, other-enriching, honest, faithful, socially responsible, life-serving, and joyous" (pp 234-235). Further, Rohr believes that "we will learn how to be properly sexual as we understand the properly passionate relationship that God has with us" (p. 32).

- Wholesome sexuality should be "**self-liberating**," flowing from the depth or core of one's being. It is expressive of one's authentic self, and conducive of the human potential to grow to full development.
- Wholesome sexuality is "**other-enriching**." It is concerned for the other, compassionate and forgiving.
- Wholesome sexuality is "**honest**." It is expressive of one's authentic self, and conducive of the human potential to grow to full development.
- Wholesome sexuality is "**honest**." It expresses truthfully the depth of an interpersonal relationship, in mutual trust and without deception.
- Wholesome sexuality is "**faithful**." It shows a consistent growth in stable relationships.
- Wholesome sexuality is "**socially responsible**." It respects the well-being of society and the common good, attentive to the immediate and long range consequences of personal activity.
- Wholesome sexuality is "**life-serving**." It recognizes the relationship between "creative" and "integrative," and provides support to human dignity in the service of the life of offspring or of society as a whole.
- Wholesome sexuality is "**joyous**." It proclaims the gift of life and the mystery of love, avoiding any vestige of mere submission to duty.

"If God wants to relate to the whole person and be known by the whole person, then our sexuality must clearly be part of what we bring to an authentic relationship with God."

Jo Anastasiadis, Whisperings of Intimacy: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Spiritual Direction, December 2009, p.20-21.



IX. BRINGING YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF TO GOD Contd.

JOURNALING/REFLECTION

Self-liberating, Other-Enriching, Honest, Faithful, Socially Responsible, Life-Serving, Joyous

Which of the above do you experience in your sexual interactions? Which do you not?

How comfortable are you discussing your own sexuality with God? With others?

If sexuality must be a part of what we bring in our authentic relationship with God, do you believe that you have an authentic relationship with God? Why or why not?

“Because if I hear the sound of the genuine in me and if you hear the sound of the genuine in you, it is possible for me to go down in my spirit and come up in your spirit. So that when I look at myself through your eyes having made that pilgrimage, I see in me what you see in me. Then the wall that separates and divides will disappear and we will become one because the sound of the genuine makes the same music.” Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman

Excerpt from Dr. Howard Thurman’s Address at Spelman College, May 4, 1980, as edited by Jo Moore Stewart for The Spelman Messenger Vol. 96 No. 4 (Summer 1980), 14-15.



IX. BRINGING YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF TO GOD Contd.

JOURNALING/REFLECTION

What is it that would make it possible for you to be freed to have a more authentic relationship with God and with others, to live fully in you?

What would nourish you to step forward with courage, clarity, and authenticity in your relationship with God?

When you finish, close your eyes, relaxing into the loving, spacious silence of God... ...Let what is most alive in your prayer take you deeper...

...Open your heart to God as fully as you can...

...Listen for God's prayer in you...

...what words does God have for you?

From The Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation's online course "Living From the Spiritual Heart" www.Shalem.org.



BEFORE WE CLOSE

It was our hope that this workbook contained information and exercises to assist individuals and communities into a germane and holistic discussion of one's spirituality and sexuality, sexual expression, gender identity and gender expression. We believe that one's sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expressions are superlatively important to one's relationship with oneself, God, and others. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas captures from Christian ethicist James Nelson in her book (*Sexuality and the Black Church*) that sexuality is more than who one has sex with.

“Sexuality is a sign, symbol, and the means of our call to communication and communion. This is the most apparent regarding other human beings and other body-selves. The mystery of our sexuality is the mystery of our need to reach out to embrace others both physically and spiritually... [Sexuality] is who we are as body-selves who experience the emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual need for intimate communion-human and divine (Douglas, p. 6).”

Douglas, Kelly Brown. Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999.

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

JOURNALING/REFLECTION

Looking back at the hopes you wrote down in the beginning of this workbook. Were any of them met? If yes, how? If no, why not?



CLOSING MEDITATIONS

Where We Are

God comes to us not where we *should have been* if we had made all the right choices in life; not where we *could have been* if we had taken every opportunity that God has offered us; not where we *wish we were* if we didn't have to be in the place where we find ourselves; not where we *think we are* because our minds are out of sync with our hearts; not where *other people* think we are or think we ought to be when they are attending to their own agendas. God meets us *where we really are*.

Margaret Silf

From Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality by Margaret Silf. Loyola Press, 2007.



Prayer to the God of Abraham

I no longer ask You for either happiness or paradise; all I ask of You is to listen and let me be aware and worthy of Your listening. I no longer ask You to resolve my questions, only to receive them and make them part of You. I no longer ask You for either rest or wisdom, I only ask You not to close me to gratitude, be it of the most trivial kind, or to surprise and friendship...

As for my enemies, I do not ask You to punish them or even to enlighten them; I only ask You not to lend them Your mask and Your powers. If You must relinquish one or the other, give them Your powers, but not Your countenance.

They are modest, my prayers, and humble. I ask You what I might ask a stranger met by chance at twilight in a barren land...

Elie Wiesel

From In One Generation After, 1970a, p. 242.

LOVING-KINDNESS METTA

Holding your hand over your heart, breathe deeply as you recite:

- May I be happy and peaceful.
- May I be free from fear and pain.
- May I live with love and compassion. And may I fully awaken and be free.

Think of a loved one:

- May you be happy and peaceful.
- May you be free from fear and pain.
- May you live with love and compassion.
- And may you fully awaken and be free.

Think of someone with whom you have resistance or brokenness:

- May you be happy and peaceful.
- May you be free from fear and pain.
- May you live with love and compassion.
- And may you fully awaken and be free.

And finally:

- May all beings be happy and peaceful.
- May all beings be free of fear and suffering.
- May all beings live with love and compassion.
- May all beings fully awaken and be free.

From Steven Smith, Center for Contemplative Mind in Society.



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.