

URBAN ABBEY

Coffee | Cause | Communion

Our Vision

We are a space of radical hospitality connecting people to God and one another in everyday life.

Hospitality

From local milk to reclaimed wood tables, whether for worship or the Farmers Market, we welcome everyone just as they are. We are a space of authenticity, engaging God's presence in the real stuff of life.

Connection

We reach out to our community from a place of deep faith. We connect with God to go out and change the world. We are not waiting for people to find us; we want to meet as many people as we can, connect, and share love.

Generosity

We believe that to explore generosity we must practice it. It is risky, but we give 10% of our coffee bar sales to local non-profits. Every month we have a different partner. Our giving is more than in-kind goods; we provide significant financial resources to do life-giving work in the community.

QueerFaith on Campus FAQs



Why do we have a QueerFaith on Campus initiative?

It all started with a Listening Campaign. We were a new campus ministry launched out of a local United Methodist coffeeshop-church and serving Creighton University and the University of Nebraska Omaha. We wanted to offer something unique to the campuses we serve rather than duplicate existing opportunities. So we embarked on a Listening Campaign. It was a series of conversations with student groups designed to identify unmet student and community needs. One of the groups that responded to our request to meet was the Creighton University Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA). At the end of the conversation, the President of the GSA invited us to come back and talk with the group more specifically about issues of faith and sexuality/gender identity. She told us that many people in the group were struggling to reconcile their sexual orientation or gender identity with a faith that taught them that they could not be both queer and Christian.

We heard this conversation as a clear call to be in ministry with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) students in Omaha. After our second conversation with the Creighton GSA and also conversations with student groups at the University of Nebraska Omaha, we determined there was sufficient interest in issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, and faith identity to create an official *QueerFaith on Campus* initiative as part of the Urban Abbey Campus Ministry.

Why is the Urban Abbey an LGBTQ-affirming faith community?

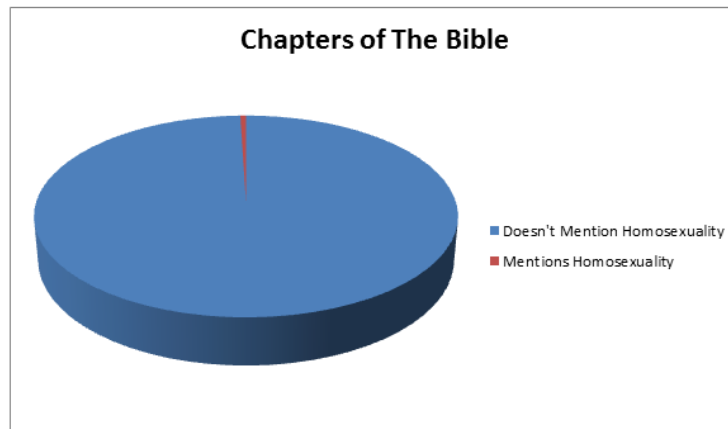
We are a United Methodist faith community. One of the great gifts of our Methodist tradition is something called The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

(henceforth, the Quad). The Quad is a method of analyzing a topic theologically using four different sources: scripture, reason, tradition and experience. Of these four, scripture is understood to be primary because of its critical role in telling the Christian story. The other three parts of the Quad are required for any reader to interpret that scripture. This is true when it comes to theological reflection about sexual orientation and gender identity as well. Our reading of the scripture regarding these questions is always informed by reason, tradition, and experience.

Quad Part I: Scripture

Folks often point to certain verses of the bible as proof that same sex relationships are wrong or that God affirms strict gender norms. These are sometimes referred to as “clobber verses” because of how they are used to hurt LGBTQIA+ people.

Compared to the bible as a whole, it actually addresses this topic extremely infrequently. One of our Mormon friends created this pie chart to reflect how many chapters in the bible deal with homosexuality. His methods aren’t terrible scientific since even the chapters that “mention homosexuality” are never entirely about the topic. But, any way you slice it (pun totally intended), the bible does not address this topic very much.



[Image credit: <http://openmormon.weebly.com/the-latest-on-open-mormon/does-the-bible-condemn-homosexuality/>]

That does not stop opponents of homosexuality from quoting a few select verses to argue that God is against same sex relationships. The cited texts include Levitical codes (e.g. *Lev 18:22, 20:13*), the story of Sodom & Gomorrah, and a few references in Paul’s letters (especially *Romans 1: 26-27*). It is important to note that Jesus himself says nothing about homosexuality, nor does the topic even arise anywhere in the four gospels.

But what about those Levitical codes?

We understand the two references to homosexuality in *Lev 18:22* and *20:13* to be ancient purity laws that are no longer relevant to us as modern people. Like the dietary restrictions, rules about women not having sex when they are menstruating, constraints on wearing clothes of two different cloths or eating meat and dairy at the same time, nearly all Christians ignore the vast majority of Levitical purity codes. We believe they were relevant to the ancient culture, but not to us in this place and time.

In fact, being a Christian might actually cause us to interact differently with these laws. In the gospels we learn that Jesus himself broke the Sabbath commandment in order to heal people on the day of rest, and this was pretty irritating to the religious authorities. Like Jesus, we believe that laws that are death-dealing for people, that lack the love and compassion he taught us, are not to be followed because they conflict with Jesus’ command to love our neighbor.

Sodom & Gomorrah

In *Genesis 19*, we encounter the story of Sodom & Gomorrah, two towns that were destroyed because of their wickedness. Before the towns are destroyed, two angels (or “men”) visit Lot, and the men of Sodom want to sexually assault them. Because of this detail in the story, folks like to say that homosexuality was the sin that caused Sodom & Gomorrah to be destroyed. Of course, this story has nothing to do with consensual same sex relationships and everything to do with attempted rape. But the desire of the men of the city to rape the angels is indicative of the real problem of Sodom & Gomorrah which is an abominable lack of hospitality to strangers and willingness to abuse the vulnerable. Interestingly, scripture itself gives us an interpretation of the sin of Sodom in *Ezekiel 16:48-49* stating “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom; she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.” No reference to homosexuality at all – but a rather uncomfortable condemnation of a society that sounds a lot like ours. But we digress...

Romans 1: 26-27

Alongside a couple other references in Paul’s letter (no time to discuss the others here...see the further resources section below), the most frequently cited ostensibly anti-homosexual scripture in the New Testament is *Romans 1:26-27*. The logic of this passage is complicated. In it, Paul claims that because Gentiles worship idols, god allowed them to be punished by giving up “natural” intercourse for “unnatural.” (Buckle up because this next section is PG-13.) Conservative interpreters assume this refers to gender complementarity – that male anatomy should be used with female anatomy. Yet genital complementarity is not referenced here. Rather natural and unnatural refers to the appropriate power relations between dominant and submissive partners. Free men are always supposed to be dominant and penetrate either women or slaves. When this assumption is undermined – through women penetrating women or free men allowing themselves to be penetrated by other men – it is “unnatural.” Being penetrated essentially makes a man submissive and like a woman. And in a misogynistic patriarchal culture, no man would ever want to be like a woman. Ultimately, sex was about expressing power and dominance over those weaker than you.

In fact, Paul’s view of sex had no concept at all of sexual orientation. He saw it as a sort of necessary evil, but if you really had to do it, you should get married (see *1 Cor 7:8-9*). This seems to be worlds away from a sexual ethic that most of us would affirm. There is no concept of sex being related to love or mutuality. It is all about satisfying physical desire in a way where power over another person is maintained, which sounds pretty harmful to us.

Some Queer-Affirming Scripture

There are a lot of themes in scripture that invite us to affirm LGBTQIA+ people and loving, same-sex relationships. An ethic of sex based in love and mutuality is one that we derive from scripture, from Jesus’ own teaching of loving one another and doing unto others as we would want to be done to ourselves. Sex is good when it is an expression of self-giving love, not when it is used for one person to dominate another – whatever the gender of the persons involved.

Affirming the goodness of God’s creation (*Genesis 1*) also means affirming the goodness of the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity that is manifest in that creation. Christ also promises us abundant life (*John 10:10*). For a queer person, abundant life often includes the ability to love and be loved by a partner whatever their sex or gender. In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter learns to include the people who his tradition has told him are unclean. Paul’s letter to the Galatians affirms an identity in Christ beyond gender. Jesus rejects purity codes to heal and restore the outcast to community. All of these themes invite us to include those whom our tradition has previously named as unwelcome.

Finally, there are stories in the bible that celebrate intimate same-sex relationships and people who exist outside of traditional gender norms. These include the deep friendship of Jonathan and David (*1 Samuel 18 – 2 Samuel 1*), the outside-the-box family creation of Ruth and Naomi (*Ruth 1-4*), and the Ethiopian Eunuch (*Acts 8:26-40*) who was the

first Gentile to be baptized!

(See Further Resources section to dig deeper into each of these examples and themes.)

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Quad Part II: Reason

As I mentioned above, we really cannot read scripture without employing the other parts of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. The Reason corner of the Quad invites us to consider such items as modern scientific understanding of human sexuality and gender identity. It reminds us that homosexuality as a concept did not exist until the 19th century. It helps us to think about the differences and continuities between the culture of the biblical text and our contemporary U.S. culture. It helps us read with nuance and intellectual honesty about what events in the bible actually happened and what ones were included for theological purposes. It helps us think about how the bible can be true even if it is not literal history in the way a history textbook might be.

Quad Part III: Tradition

While there are certainly parts of the tradition that condemn homosexuality, there are also parts that move us to affirming people of all gender identities and sexual orientations. Doctrines that affirm the goodness of all creation invite us to affirm people's identities beyond the human-constructed binaries of male vs. female or gay vs. straight. Movements for social justice that emphasize the preferential option for the poor and marginalized invite us to see the vulnerability of sexual and gender minorities and advocate for their liberation and well-being.

Our own United Methodist Social Principles affirm "*Equal Rights Regardless of Sexual Orientation...* Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation... Moreover, we support efforts to stop violence and other forms of coercion against all persons, regardless of sexual orientation."

While members of our denomination are not of one mind regarding the full affirmation of LGBTQIA+ persons, the Urban Abbey is committed to proclaiming and working toward a future where same sex partnerships and queer clergy are celebrated without hesitation.

Quad Part IV: Experience

The Experience corner of the Quad invites us to think about the lived experience of LGBTQIA+ people and the effects of our theology on their ability to live full, safe, and abundant lives. It invites us to see the death-dealing effects of religious and societal condemnation such as the increased risk of suicide among LGBTQIA+ youth who are rejected by their families and increased risk of homelessness and violence toward queer folks. But it also invites us to see the abundant life that is possible when queer people are affirmed. We see the example of the love of Christ in same-sex loving relationships, and we see the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the queer clergy and lay people living as Christian disciples.

Finally, the experience corner of the Quad is where we do our own spiritual reflection on how God is moving us to love and support LGBTQIA+ people. Here at the Urban Abbey, we have studied and prayed and discerned that we are fully committed to the affirmation and embrace of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. We hope that you will join us in our work of throwing the doors of welcome and inclusion open wide for all of God's children.

What are some Further Resources I could read to learn more?

Sermons

“Easing Burdens, Being Blessed.” Former Abbey campus minister Rev. Chris Jorgensen explains the rationale for starting QueerFaith on Campus. <http://urbanabbeyoldmarket.blogspot.com/2016/01/easing-burdens-being-blessed.html>

“You are God’s Audaciously Diverse Creation.” Rev. Chris invites us to consider the story of Peter’s heart being opened to include Gentiles as a call to radical inclusion. <http://urbanabbeyoldmarket.blogspot.com/2016/04/you-are-gods-audaciously-diverse.html>

Websites

Facts about Suicide. The Trevor Project. <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/facts-about-suicide>

Janet Edmonds. The Bible Doesn’t Say That Homosexuality is a Sin: An Analysis of the Seven Scriptures Sometimes Claimed to Refer to Homosexuality. <http://www.rmnetwork.org/newrmn/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Booklet-about-Homosexuality-and-the-Bible-Sept.-2016.pdf>

Queer Theology. <https://www.queertheology.com>. Lots of good resources for exploration about how to be a queer-affirming Christian.

Articles

Richard B. Hays, “Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies: The Witness of Scripture Concerning Homosexuality.” In *Homosexuality and the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

Martin, Dale B. “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32.” In *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 58.

Dan O. Via. “Response to Robert A. J Gagnon.” In Robert A. J. Gagnon and Dan O. Via, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

Books

Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate. Justin Lee.

Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology. Patrick S. Cheng.

Queer Bible Commentary. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, Thomas Bohache.