



**VALUING FAMILIES:**  
**CHRISTIAN EDUCATION FOR THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD**  
**FACILITATOR'S GUIDE**

A CLGS Asian Pacific Islander Roundtable Resource

A LIVING OUTFRONT Program

The Curriculum Project  
The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry  
at Pacific School of Religion

# VALUING FAMILIES: CHRISTIAN EDUCATION For the HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

A CURRICULUM OF LIVING OUTFRONT

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# ABOUT: LIVING OUTFRONT

## THE CLGS CURRICULUM PROJECT

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The CLGS Curriculum Project provides congregation-based education and training for Christian faith communities. These programs encourage a deeper appreciation of how social and economic justice ministries reside at the heart of Christian faith and practice. God's grace, offered through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, is manifested in the commitment to God's abundant life for all people, and indeed, for the whole planet.

That vision of abundant life provides the framework for these curricular programs. In a world of deep divisions, broken relationships, and fractured communities, CLGS invites Christian congregations to shape their ministries with that divine promise of abundance for all. Living OutFront focuses particularly on biblical, spiritual, and theological engagements with human sexuality and gender, and especially for the full thriving and flourishing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, both in faith communities and in the wider society.

Rather than a single curriculum for all congregations, CLGS is committed to addressing the rich cultural diversity of Christian faith communities in the U.S. by tailoring the component programs of this project to the particular needs of the communities CLGS seeks to serve. All of these particular programs nevertheless share a common framework for Christian education, rooted in the classic touchstones of sin, repentance, and salvation.

CLGS is committed to expanding and improving these curricular programs “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). Feedback from participating congregations is vitally important in that shared work of ministry. CLGS can be contacted through the Center's website ([www.clgs.org](http://www.clgs.org)) or by sending an email to: [outfront@clgs.org](mailto:outfront@clgs.org).

## LIFE ABUNDANT

### A THEOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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#### Introduction

In the Gospel according to John, Jesus declares that he has come that all may have life and have it *abundantly* (10:10). Both the gospel writer and Jesus likely had images in mind of Eden, the paradise in which the Creator God had placed the first humans where they could enjoy the Creator's goodness. In that garden, God declared that the creation was unreservedly good (Gen. 1:10).

All people, without exception, are created to enjoy the goodness of God's creation. No one is excluded from the divine promise of abundant life—not for reasons of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, or gender, and dis/ability.

Yet this vision of abundance has not yet become a reality for everyone. Indeed, all people fall short of that glorious abundance that God intends for God's creation (Romans 3:23). Human communities and the planet itself are broken by what Christian traditions refer to as *sin*. Turning away from anything that blocks the full flourishing of life and turning toward the abundance of God's blessing describes a lifelong posture Christians have called *repentance*. All of this is animated by the Gospel hope of embracing the abundant life that Jesus came to offer, which takes many diverse and wonderful forms; this is what Christians mean by *salvation*.

The Living OutFront curriculum project is rooted in this fundamental Christian framework marked by sin, repentance, and salvation. This traditional framework resonates deeply with the biblical witness and with many centuries of Christian history.

The Bible has, of course, been read and interpreted in diverse ways. At times, the Bible has been used to exclude particular groups of people—whether because of their race, ethnicity, sexuality, or gender, and dis/ability—from God's promise of abundant life. Living OutFront curricular programs offer a way for Christian faith communities to respect the unique role of the Bible

in Christianity, including the spiritual authority of Scripture, while also embracing its liberating message for all people. The Bible is both inspired and inspiring, as it equips people for “every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16).

Retrieving and reclaiming the classic arc of Christian faith from sin through repentance and toward salvation provides a solid theological and spiritual framework for these curricular programs. More specifically, this framework can revitalize and strengthen the social justice ministries offered with and for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.

Irenaeus, a second century Christian theologian, once observed that “the glory of God is the human person fully alive.” Living OutFront programs are designed to inspire and to urge Christian faith communities to put that vision of abundant life “out front” of all else.

## 1. The Reality of Sin

**Biblical writers used a wide range of images to describe sin. Yet most of those writers shared this in common: sin is manifested in broken relationship. What Christians have called “The Ten Commandments,” for example, are not arbitrary rules but ways of being in relationship with God, with each other, and the wider world around us (Exodus 20:1-17).**

The effects of sin are clearly evident today: deeply fractured communities divided by race and ethnicity; families ruptured by domestic violence and sexual abuse; nations torn apart by dictatorial regimes and genocidal wars; the most vulnerable among us left without resources in a dissolving social safety net; and ecological degradation that puts the future of life on this planet at risk.

Humans have travelled a long way from Eden, where, according to the biblical writer in Genesis, Adam and Eve flourished as they lived in harmony with each other, with their environment, and with their Creator. In stark contrast to the image of paradise, we live in an imperfect and, in many ways, a broken world. Wherever and whenever the dignity of any human being is denied or anyone’s potential for abundant life is curtailed—whether because of race, class, ability, sexuality, or gender—sin is present and active.

Biblical writers would agree with that view of sin as they wrote about it mostly with reference to economic injustice and social oppression (see Jeremiah 22:3 and Ezekiel 22:7, 29 as just a few among many examples). But they also wrote about individual sin, too. Jesus said that the greatest commandments are these: to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mt. 22:33-40). These “great” commandments offer a vision of love as the source of abundant life, which includes loving ourselves just as God loves and delights in us.

As many LGBT people have discovered, however, loving ourselves can be challenging when we are taught from an early age to be ashamed of who we are and who God has created us to be. That sense of shame can lead to self-loathing and isolation; it can also lead to sexually abusive and violent relationships. Whatever prevents us from loving ourselves will likewise keep

us from loving others, loving the planet, and loving God with our whole heart, mind, and strength. Recognizing those moments of “love prevented” urges all of us to the practice of *repentance*.

## 2. The Call to Repentance

**What do Christians mean by that “repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:18)? If sin describes a broken relationship, what would repentance mean in a world marked by fractured and divided relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with God’s creation?**

In the Hebrew Bible, sin is most commonly described with the word *het*, which means “going astray,” especially straying from the path that leads to life. In Deuteronomy, Moses urges the Israelites to choose that life-giving path (30:19-20). Similarly, repentance is described with the term *teshuvah*, which means “return,” or coming back to the path of life.

New Testament writers use the Greek word *hamartia* when they refer to sin, which means “missing the mark,” or falling short of a target. The word we translate as “repentance” is the Greek term *metanoia*, which refers to “perceiving differently,” or changing one’s mind. When Paul preached among the Greeks in Athens, he urged them to “repentance,” to change their minds about the inanimate objects they were worshipping in their temples, and to embrace the living God, the one in whom everyone lives, and moves, and has being (Acts 17:28).

In both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, repentance thus marks a turn and a return, a directional change in relationship—with self, with others, and therefore with God—that enriches and deepens our life together. Rather than an isolated or single moment in time, repentance shapes a life-long practice of directing ourselves and our relationships toward that abundant life God intends for all.

The abundance of God’s life includes the goodness of human sexuality and the joy it offers in our families and intimate

relationships. That divine goodness includes heterosexual couples, same-gender loving people, people who choose celibacy, multi-generational households, and those who embrace transgendered forms of living and relationship, to name just a few.

God's good gift, however, is too often distorted in a world marred by sex trafficking, the commodification of human bodies, racial and ethnic stereotyping, domestic violence, economic oppression, and sexual addictions. Whenever and wherever the fullness of life is denied or rejected, in ourselves or to others, the Gospel calls us to repent and to hope for *salvation*.

### 3. The Hope of Salvation

**Everyone longs to live life to the fullest and to be free of the burdens that hold us back from abundant life. In the midst of life's difficulties, everyone seeks the "peace that passes all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). That peace, like a sail lifting a boat over the waves of a storm-tossed sea, offers unimaginable comfort, even in the face of death. That peace assures us that the God who made us also waits for us with open arms to welcome us home. That peace surely marks what Christians call "salvation."**

Gospel writers portrayed salvation in diverse ways. Jesus offered salvation to all yet also addressed each person's particular, individual needs. At times salvation appears as healing from physical ailment; at others, as the forgiveness of sin. Sometimes it's both at the same time (Mt. 9:2-7). Luke described the saving work of Jesus by drawing from the Hebrew prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," Luke's Jesus says, to "bring good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4:18).

While God's loving faithfulness remains constant, it often takes time for us to see it clearly and to perceive how the saving work of Christ can transform us and our communities. Each person's family history, cultural background, and social situation will shape our perceptions of salvation a bit differently. For all of us, our understanding of salvation unfolds over time. As the Apostle Paul noted, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly—but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

LGBT people are multi-dimensional people just like everyone else. They experience joys and challenges; they have faults, miss the mark, and fall short of the glory God intends for all—just like everyone else. And just like everyone else, God loves and cherishes LGBT people for exactly who they

are as they travel, just like everyone else, toward abundant life.

For some, that spiritual journey involves extra burdens placed on them by others. When LGBT people try to deny their same-gender attraction or try to conform to the gendered expectations of their communities, they live with burdens God did not intend. For them, salvation will entail the freedom to embrace fully their God-given lives.

As Christian people, we are called to help others embrace God's abundant life. For some of us, this will mean repenting of the harm we have done to LGBT people. For others, it will mean realizing the harm we have done to ourselves and how deeply we are loved and cherished by God. For everyone, it will mean the reconciliation of broken relationships, which the Apostle Paul described as the ministry of all Christians (2 Cor. 5:18).

That great work of reconciliation, that gift of abundant life, is nothing less than divine salvation in Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

# INTRODUCTION: VALUING FAMILIES

## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION FOR THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

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Most mainstream congregational education programs that affirm lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people focus on sexual orientation identity and diversity to serve the goal of inclusion. This approach is clearly helpful for sexual and gender minorities struggling against the oppressive assumptions of a “straight” majority.

That kind of approach, however, neglects the multiple layers of marginalization experienced by Asian and Pacific Islander (API) people who also identify with LGBT sensibilities. This is also the case for any community facing the overlapping identities marked by race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender. LGBT people of color frequently experience profound conflicts in trying to navigate those multiple identifications, especially in Christian congregations where racial/ethnic belonging provides a communal space not only to survive but thrive.

This curriculum focuses on the API experience of, and commitment to, extended family in community. API families are often extended families in both blood and community, which differs significantly from the dominant model of the nuclear family in the United States. Given this experience of an extended family, it is quite likely that an API individual will be vaguely aware of at least one family member who identifies as LGBT, be it a cousin, an aunt, a niece, an uncle, a nephew, or a long-time neighbor.

This curriculum can be helpful for other racial/ethnic, regional, rural communities that value the extended family as well. In these materials, the educational process does not rely on questions of identity and difference but rather on questions of relationship and connection. How then do we treat each other properly like family members? All other aspects related to LGBT concerns—what it means to be a Christian community, how to use the Bible responsibly, how to think ethically about human sexuality, how to face changing communal realities, and so on— will be addressed from that foundation of relationship and connection.

In that light, all of the sessions in this curriculum involve both “nurturing” and “nudging.” The goal of this program is thus two-fold: to nurture the familial bonds of faith in Christian communities and to nudge those same communities toward an even more expansive view and embrace of faith family relations.

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## The Program At-a-Glance

**Valuing Families** consists of five Nurture & Nudge sessions with options. Each of the session is flexible and can be between 60-90 minutes. The curriculum works well when participants are committed to the whole program of study, in which sessions are regularly offered every 2 weeks as an adult education or bible study offering.



### Schedule of Sessions

**Nurture & Nudge 1:** *Valuing Families*

**Nurture & Nudge 2:** *Becoming Church*

**Nurture & Nudge 3:** *The Letter and the Spirit*

**Nurture & Nudge 4:** *In the Image of God*

# HOW TO USE

## PLANNING FOR CONGREGATIONS AND FACILITATORS

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Every educational program requires intentional and collaborative modes of preparation, both for the community and the facilitators. **Valuing Families** invites active learning from individual participants, which includes developing a process of sharing insights within a community of learners that respects diverse opinions and perspectives.

We recommend plenty of lead time before launching the program, including a process for participants to pre-register. A successful program will require regular commitment from participants, not only during the group sessions but also for some individual preparation between sessions. This Facilitator's Guide includes: suggestions for facilitating conversation during the sessions, and handouts for those sessions.

### Congregational Preparation

1. **PLAN:** Congregational leadership should consider carefully when this kind of educational program ought to take place and then allow at least two months lead time before beginning the program.
2. **LEADERS:** The facilitator may wish to form a small planning committee with 1 or 2 church members. Some sessions work better with two co-facilitators.
3. **CALENDAR:** Set dates and advertise for sign-ups!

### Facilitator Preparation

**READ:** Facilitators should read through the entire curriculum well before the program launches in order to have materials prepared in advance and to make adjustments based on a particular congregation's needs.

**SHARE:** Facilitators for this program are not expected to be "experts" in the topics considered. The facilitator's role is to create space during the group sessions for sharing insights.

**ADAPT:** This guide provides a way to engage a Christian faith community in shared learning. The suggestions for facilitators in this guide are not meant to be a "script" to follow to the letter and can be adapted for particular community needs. Recognizing the diversity of communities, cultures and Christian traditions within the API community, we especially encourage facilitators to take the time to consider how to best adapt and modify the curriculum to maximize engagement and learning for their particular group.

### Tips for Facilitating Christian Conversation

- Effective Christian education **need not achieve perfect agreement** among the participants. Indeed, learning how to remain in community with people with whom we may disagree can deepen a congregation's shared life and ministry. Facilitators might consider setting that kind of tone early on in this curriculum.
- Facilitating conversation requires **careful discernment of the collective energy** of a group as well as the unique personalities of the participants. The "Accords" for Christian conversation included in this Guide can be a useful tool for encouraging respectful interaction in group settings; facilitators are encouraged to return to this tool frequently during the program.
- **Inviting the endorsement of a trusted member of the community.** In some cases, it may be appropriate to invite a trusted member in the community to endorse or provide extra encouragement for participation and engagement with the conversation and bible study. In the API community, this is often the pastor, a respected elder, "uncle", or "auntie" whose endorsement and encouragement of the study could help secure more committed engagement of their community around LGBT issues.

- **Inviting participation from all the participants.** Notice whether some members speak more than others. Gently invite equal space for everyone to contribute, by saying, “Let us hear from those who have not spoken.”
- **Not every question needs to be answered.** In topics concerning faith, theology, and spirituality, there are many questions that simply cannot be answered adequately. Moreover, no one (either ordained or lay) is an encyclopedia. It’s perfectly acceptable to answer a question by saying, “I don’t know,” or “I’m not sure; does anyone else here have a suggestion?”
- Facilitators can acknowledge respectfully particular issues that are raised but which may not be relevant to the program and then **gently nudge the conversation back** to the topic at hand. Most curricular programs raise concerns that may not be directly related to the program’s goals.
- **All facilitators are frequently tempted to avoid conflict, and in some cases, that’s a good instinct. But disagreements are often the seeds for wider communal insights.** Without stopping conversation, a facilitator can remind everyone of the importance of respectful dialogue and how our diverse perspectives can yield fresh insights. It’s also perfectly acceptable to invite a group to “agree to disagree” on a particular point and remind the group that “unity” need not require “uniformity” of opinion.

## Setting the Space

Many congregations are well practiced at setting appropriate spaces for learning and conversation. This part of planning is important. Education is as much a “sacred” endeavor as worship and liturgy. Just as a congregation seeks to make worship space welcoming, so also a community’s educational space deserves careful attention. Here are a few suggestions:

- Unless the number of participants precludes this, we recommend creating a **circle or semi-circle** of chairs to help the participants engage with each other.
- Subtle and simple elements can be added (like candles, fabric coverings on tables, etc.) to help **create a more “sacred space”** for the learning and conversation.
- A sufficient number of **handouts or worksheets** should be printed and ready before the beginning of the group session.
- **Light refreshments**—even just the availability of water—can also help create a hospitable space for learning.
- **Accords for Christian Conversation** handout should be provided for each session. A simplified version is located in the Appendix.

# ACCORDS

## A COVENANT FOR CHRISTIAN CONVERSATION

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**Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).**

**There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).**

**For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another (Romans 12:4-5).**

Building and sustaining Christian community requires a great deal of hard but also joyful work. The work itself moves us into greater union with each other and with God, in Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Christian education is a key component in such community building. How we learn with and from each other, however, involves an intentional process of paying attention to the experiences of others, through whom we can discover fresh insights about the life of faith we share in the one God.

As we seek to engage in such faithful education, it’s important to remember that there are many distractions in our twenty-first century world, from cell phones and pagers to the various leftovers from the day’s multi-tasking responsibilities. Effective community building relies in part on setting aside all those many distractions and being present to each other when we gather.



**The process of faithful learning thus begins by:**

- Showing up on time and not leaving early;
- Agreeing to be “here” and “now” when the community gathers;
- Turning off electronic devices (such as cell phones and pagers).

In addition, engaging together in a process of learning as people of faith often involves addressing topics about which there are likely multiple opinions, perspectives, and experiences. To help ensure that all of these perspectives contribute to the insights of the whole group, the following “Godly guidelines” for conversation will serve as a covenant for leading us deeper into our shared life of faith when we meet.

**We prayerfully agree that we will:**

- Speak only for ourselves (using “I” statements);
- Speak to build up and not tear down;
- Take responsibility for our own thoughts and feelings;
- Respect the God-given dignity of every human being;
- Acknowledge our misperceptions and our insights with each other;
- Recognize that thriving communities can and often do contain multiple perspectives;
- Realize that learning often means changing one’s mind about something;
- Honor confidentiality unless permission to share is explicitly given.

**Learning also necessarily involves careful listening, especially to those with whom we may disagree. We will engage in such “sacred listening” to each other by:**

- Seeking God in the experience of others;
- Accepting those experiences as valid for the speakers;
- Searching for strengths in the other’s position;
- Avoiding interruptions and argument;
- Refraining from applause or other overt reactions to speakers;
- Allowing each person to speak before others speak again.

These “accords” for conversation will not automatically resolve disagreements. They will, however, invite everyone to recognize disagreements as occasions for learning and growth. The work of Christian conversion is a lifelong process and will involve many moments of changing one’s mind about particular matters of concern.

As a Christian community, therefore, we also prayerfully take as our primary guide in our work the Apostle Paul’s insistence that three things above all others matter most: faith, hope, and love. And even further, as Paul insists, the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13: 13).

[See Appendix for a simplified handout on “Accords” to be used for every session]

# NURTURE & NUDGE I : VALUING FAMILIES

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## OUTCOMES FOR THE SESSION

- Create a respectful and prayerful space of learning and sharing.
- Introduce the program's goals, logistics, and intentions.
- Review Accords for Christian Conversation.
- Building community among participants.
- Make a personal connection between the participant and LGBT concerns.

## Materials:

- One big candle, tealight candles, lighter or tapered candles.
- Handouts from Appendix: *Accords for a Christian Conversation A Prayer for Valuing Families Curriculum*
- Colored paper for family web diagram
- Easel with paper, and markers
- Pens
- Bibles—NRSV preferred
- Snacks

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## TO BEGIN

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### PARTICIPANTS' INTRODUCTION

The facilitator welcomes the participants, invites to share with another person, or group:

1. Name. How long have you been coming to this church ?
2. Why did you sign up for this program ?
3. What do you hope to learn ?

### GATHERING —Lighting of the candles

The facilitator invites the participants into a time and space of prayer and intention.

1. Distribute a tealight candle to each participant.
2. "Close your eyes and imagine bringing your heart into this hour [pause]. Or, think of the name of a person that you would like to light a candle for."
3. "Open your eyes. We will each light a candle either for our own heart, or for someone we are thinking of, and then put it in the center."
4. Distribute *A Prayer for Valuing Families Curriculum* handout (see Appendix).
5. Together, slowly read this as a beginning prayer. Say "Amen" at the end.
6. Light the center candle, saying "As we light the center candle together, we are inviting the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ to be among us."

## PROGRAM INTRODUCTION

The facilitator explains the goals, logistics and conversation practice of the program.

Goals of the overall program:

The purpose of this curriculum is to provide a learning process for congregations to experience a way of relating to lesbian and gay concerns that is culturally-respectful, spiritually-grounded and relationship-oriented, in order to nurture and equip all to understand lesbian and gay concerns in a holistic way, and to engage with grace, confidence and compassion.

Logistics

Five 60-90 min. group sessions (with some supplementary exercises online and/or as agreed upon by the group)

Practice

Take turns to read *Accords—A Covenant for Christian Conversation* paragraph by paragraph.

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## ACTIVITY

### FAMILY WEB

1. Give participants a colored letter-size paper and a pen.
2. Ask each participant to **write their name** (or draw a stick figure) in the center.  
Draw a circle around the name or stick figure.
3. Write the names of **their given family** inside that circle, whether they have an ongoing relationship with that member or not. The given family includes: parents, step-parents, adopted parents, spouse or partner, ex-spouse or ex-partner, siblings, step-sisters, step-brothers etc.
4. Draw another circle around the immediate family circle. Add names for **extended family**, starting with that of one parent, and continuing with that of another: including grand-parents, aunts and uncles, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, first cousins, second cousins, their spouses and children, grandchildren, grand nephews, grand nieces, grand-uncles, grand-aunts etc.
5. Add names of people **who have cared for you as family** while you were growing up or away from home, including long-time neighbors, family friends, godparents. Also people whom you care for like family, including any young persons, elderly friends, your close friends from church family.
6. **Ask** the following questions:  
**What do we hope from our family?**  
**What do we wish for our family?**  
[Highlight: well-being, health, protection, happiness, acceptance etc.]
7. Around the circles with all the names, ask participants to draw a big box representing culture. Explain that this symbolizes how culture affects our family, recognizing that this may mean many cultures (i.e., both American and Filipino, for instance). **Ask** the following question:  
**How does culture affect how we view family and the role and influence of family?**

### TEACHING MOMENT

“Now looking at your family web, there are **3 things** that one needs to know:

**First** of all, one person, or more, in this family web is lesbian or gay, bisexual, or transgender—whether you know or are aware of it or not, regardless of whether they can share it or not.

**Second.** At some point in their life, more often than not, this person(s) and their family will feel the need to hide this

truth from you. They might have experienced shame, anguish, isolation and judgment.

**Third.** The need to hide is because they just cannot be sure, without a doubt, that the relationship with their extended family, their church family, might stay intact if the truth is out."

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## SHARING

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1. Invite participants to feel/think about this scenario in silence for a few moments.
2. Invite participants to share their experience (a word, few sentences etc.).
3. If appropriate for the group, invite participants to consider and share how LGBT issues are viewed or experienced in their family web. *"Do they talk about it? Are there supportive people? Are there known LGBT people, whether or not it is talked about? What is the general climate about LGBT issues in the family web?"*

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## BIBLE STUDY

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### SCRIPTURES on Family Virtues

Invite one participant to read from Bibles you provide line by line, or one reader if you wish:

*So, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion and kindness. Put on humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another, and be gracious to one another when you have a complaint against somebody. Just as Christ has forgiven you, you do the same. And on top of all these qualities put on love, which ties them together and completes them. And let the peace of Christ be the referee in your hearts. That peace is what you're called to, as one body. And be thankful (Colossians 3:12-15).*

1. During the reading, write out the virtues on a poster-size paper on an easel—Love, Peace, Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Meekness, Patience, Forgiveness, Thankfulness. Hang up the poster for everyone to see.
2. Ask each participant to pick 1 or 2 virtues that they would particularly like to lift up to God in prayer for their family web, as they conclude this session. Alternatively or additionally, ask each participant which virtue they personally would like to cultivate more within themselves and why.
3. Save this poster later to put back up for next session.

CLOSING PRAYER

A Breathing Prayer for our Family Webs

1. "Look at a virtue on the poster, and take a deep breath to draw in the word.

Imagine that you are breathing IN from God. [Pause].

Repeat. Breath IN. [Pause]

Again."

2. "Now look at your family web.

We are asking God to use us as a channel.

We are breathing IN the word of family virtue.

And we breath OUT that same virtue into our web."

3. "So ... Breath IN the word ... [pause]

And ... Breath OUT ... into our family web ..."

"Again ... breath IN ... breath OUT [pause]

4. "Now close your eyes ...

breath IN the word ...

breath OUT ... into family web ... [pause]

Repeat ... IN ... OUT ...

Again ... IN ... OUT ... [Pause]

5. Repeat one last time ...

... IN the word ...

... OUT onto your family ... [long pause]

And very slowly ... we will open our eyes

Amen.

# NURTURE & NUDGE 2 : BECOMING CHURCH

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## OUTCOMES FOR THE SESSION

- Maintain a respectful and prayerful space of learning and sharing.
- Review the Accords for Christian Conversation.
- Present the story of how the early Christians struggled to become inclusive.
- Participants reflect on how the story is both instructive and limited in inspiring us to be welcoming of LGBT people, those considered an “outsider,” and how God calls us to reach out, and to overcome our prejudices and stereotypes.

## Materials:

- One big candle, tealight candles, lighter or tapered candles.
- Handouts from Appendix: *Accords for a Christian Conversation A Prayer for Valuing Families Curriculum, Part 1- Cornelius & Peter, Part 2/3- Peter/James*
- Poster of family virtues from last week
- Easel with paper, and markers
- Bibles—NRSV preferred
- Snacks

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## TO BEGIN

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### WELCOME & ACCORDS

1. If there are new participants, the facilitator welcomes and ask them (a) to say their names, (b) how long have they been coming to this church, (c) why they sign-up for this study, and (d) what they hope to learn.
2. Pass out the Accords. Take turns to read sections aloud.

### GATHERING - Lighting the candles

The facilitator invites the participants into a time and space of prayer and intention

1. Pass out two tealight candles. Pass out lighters for participants to light one tealight candle, symbolizing the presence and openness of their heart to what God has for them during the time. Tell them to save the other tealight for later.
2. Light the center candle last, saying “As we light the center candle together, we are inviting the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ be among us.”
3. Pass out the *A Prayer for Valuing Families Curriculum* handout.  
Read the prayer together slowly as a beginning prayer, ending with “Amen.”

### Reconnecting

1. The facilitator puts up a poster-size paper with the family virtues (from the last session or on a new one if you need to): Love, Peace, Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Meekness, Patience, Forgiveness, Thankfulness.
2. “At the end of the last session, we prayed to God for these family virtues to be infused into the unique family web that we each made. In this session, we continue to hold these virtues before us, as we learn thoughtfully from the Scriptures.”

3. "This week we are looking at anti-bullying and how the early Christian community struggled with whom to associate and include as church family."
4. "So ... do you remember what you ate last week? (wait for a few responses)  
If we had shrimp or pork, then we have eaten disgusting things—abominations to God, at least according to the Bible. This is from the food guidelines found in Leviticus that set the stage for our bible study today. We are not reading Lev. 11 on what to eat and what not eat, but some have called that bible passage "the unclean, the unholy, the detestable, and the abominable!"
5. We are dividing today's scriptures from the book of Acts into 3 parts. (Write out the following on the easel):
  - Part 1 - Cornelius and Peter
  - Part 2 - Peter's response to his critics
  - Part 3 - Peter vs. James at the Jerusalem Council

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## BIBLE STUDY

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### Part 1 – Cornelius and Peter (see handout in Appendix)

#### TEACHING MOMENT #1

- Jesus broke a lot of social, cultural, gender taboos and barriers which had been practiced and maintained since ancient Israel. He associated with outcasts that his peers considered sinners: prostitutes, lepers, tax collectors, Gentiles (non-Israelites).
- First-generation Jesus followers were Israelites (the believers in Judea), who initially preached the gospel only to fellow Israelites. This story is an example of inclusion of non-Israelites into the Israelite majority community of early Christians.
- The early Christian community of Israelite majority struggled to include Gentiles, because Israelite-stereotypes of the Gentiles ran deep. They accepted Gentiles, kind of, sort of, but you can see that there was a pull-back, a push-back. (Maybe people who ate disgusting foods like shrimp were sexually immoral too ...)

### Part 2 – Peter's response to his critics (see handout in Appendix)

#### TEACHING MOMENT #2

- When Peter realized that God does not make a distinction between Israelites and Gentiles, it came from the contrast between holy and unholy foods. Peter's vision highlighted the stereotype that the Gentiles were "detestable," "unholy," practicing "abominations."
- So after hearing Peter's experience, the Christians in Judea were dumbstruck by God's impartiality. Their only reaction was to praise God who has given "even to the Gentiles" the repentance that leads to life. (The irony of a deep-seated stereotype remains in the phrase "even to the Gentiles," meaning even those disgusting people).

### Part 3 – Peter vs. James at the Jerusalem Council (see handout in Appendix)

#### TEACHING MOMENT #3

- James' opinion after Peter's ah-ha moment emphasized that Gentiles' need to abstain from fornication, regardless of the devout example of Cornelius, "an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation." This confirmed another Israelite stereotype against the Gentiles: that they were sexually immoral.
- Perhaps the challenge of including Gentiles in the early Christian community parallels the challenge of including LGBT people in our church family today: God's impartiality is affirmed, and there are also many negative stereotypes and misinformation to hook onto fears and to justify discrimination, even theologically.

- We accept our LGBT brothers and sisters, in principle. God loves them, of course. We love them too. But in the back of some minds, there is a worry that they eat disgusting food and have disgusting sex. They live this “homosexual lifestyle.” They are even more immoral than the most immoral heterosexual!
- All our stereotypes leap out and we put conditions on their acceptance, their faith and their leadership, based on our worst prejudice. This is how we end up with Don’t Ask Don’t Tell and let bullying happen in schools of our young people. We need to continue to learn about being church family together, just like the early church did. Who are we to hinder who can be in God’s family?

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## SHARING

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In becoming the kind of church family that is marked by Love, Peace, Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Meekness, Patience, Forgiveness, and Thankfulness we need to ask the question of whether or how we are being family to each other with regard to LGBT concerns:

### A. WHOLE GROUP

- What is the culture in our church in terms of appreciating each other and valuing each other’s differences or uniqueness?
- How does our church/denomination view LGBT people?
- Where does this perception come from?
- It is no secret that a large amount of the bullying among youth are towards LGBT youth or those perceived to be or act “gay.” Did you hear your church or other Christian people address this or respond to this problem? Why or why not?
- How do you help break the silence around LGBT concerns?
- So that we do no harm: What can you, your small group or your church do to help fight bullying, especially toward LGBT people?
- So that we listen to one another: what is the nature of fears around LGBT concerns?
- So that we see each other: helping each other to unlearning stereotypes supportively ?

### B. SMALL GROUPS

In groups of 2-3, brainstorm and name some of the misinformation and stereotypes about gay persons (i.e., “queer,” and “so gay” as negative labels etc.). These are probably things you wouldn’t say but would either think or have thought of at some point. They are also things you could hear a school aged young person saying.

For each of these stereotypes, ask the following questions:

1. What is being discredited here? And what are the values prioritized?
2. What is the nature of fear/anger/worry behind the comment?
3. What is the shame that underlies such opinion?

## TEACHING MOMENT #3

The responses we gave to how people respond to gay people demonstrates some of the roots of homophobia. They are responses based on negative values, degrading others, fear, anger, worry, and shame.



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## TO CLOSE

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### CLOSING PRAYER

The family virtues of Love, Peace, Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Meekness, Patience, Forgiveness, and Thankfulness are qualities that we ALL intend, in order to build up the church family. They are not private and personal qualities.

Similarly, the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23): Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control are gifts that sustain and build our life together as church.

And so before we close in prayer, I ask you take a moment to choose one virtue in particular that you would like to ask God to build further inside you, as a member of your church and as a person who wants to become more understanding about LGBT people and their issues.

When you are ready, light the tealight to represent that virtue and place it around the big candle. Once everybody has placed their "virtue" by the big candle, I will close us in prayer.

*Let us center our hearts and minds and body.*

*We send out our intention to ask the Holy Spirit to pour out upon all of us*

*all these virtues. But we especially ask the Holy Spirit to build into each of us*

*the virtue that our candle represents. May our hearts to be open to the way*

*God will lead us to grow in valuing and loving one another, especially those*

*who are different from us and especially LGBT people.*

*Amen.*

# NURTURE & NUDGE 3: THE LETTER & THE SPIRIT

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## OUTCOMES FOR THE SESSION

- Maintain a respectful and prayerful space of learning and sharing.
- Review the Accords for Christian Conversation.
- Present examples on how the Bible has been used in civil histories.
- Reflect on how to read the Bible responsibly.
- Practice applying the three factors of ethical reading to Romans 1:26-27.

## Materials:

- Handouts from Appendix: *Accords, Case Study on Slavery*
- One big candle, tealight candles, lighter or tapered candles.
- Easel and marker with Scripture from 2 Timothy
- Bibles—NRSV preferred

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## TO BEGIN

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### WELCOME & ACCORDS

1. If there are new participants, the facilitator welcomes and ask them (a) to say their names, (b) how long have they been coming to this church, (c) why they signed up for this study, and (d) what they hope to learn.
2. Pass out the Accords and review.

### GATHERING —Lighting the candle

The facilitator invites the participants into “a time and space of prayer and intention.”

1. Ask participants to think of a favorite bible verse or story that comes to mind.
2. Invite them to light a candle for that bible verse/story. Pass out a lighter.
3. Light the center candle last. Read the following verse.
4. [Preparation: write out the verse on an easel for everyone to see]

*All scripture is inspired by God and is<sup>s</sup> useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16).*

### RECONNECTING

1. “The title of this session is the Letter and the Spirit. After sharing the opening verse together from that 2 Timothy, do you have any initial thoughts about why we might as Christians look at both the ‘letter’ and the ‘spirit?’”
2. This letter to Timothy was expected to be ‘heard aloud’ by early Christian communities. For such an audience, what do you think “all scripture” means? [Answer: “the Law and the Prophets” during Jesus’ time, i.e. most of Old Testament.]
3. What would “all scripture” mean for our contemporary Christian church? [Answer: at least Old Testament plus New Testament.] Does your church use ALL scripture equally? Some books more frequently? Some less frequently? Why?

4. "All scripture is inspired by God." What is the end use of the bible, according to the last sentence of 2 Tim. 3:16? [Answer: Equip for good works.] In short, **all scripture is to be used by the church in a way that supports what is good.** However, that is not necessarily a given in the history of the Christian church. Let us look at an example of use, or rather abuse.

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## BIBLE STUDY

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1. Distribute *The Use of the Bible to Support Slavery* handout (see Appendix)
2. Invite everyone to take just a few minutes to read.
3. Ask a participant to read aloud the "Consider and Discuss section."
4. Reflect together briefly.

## TEACHING MOMENT

There are a total of 3 factors to consider for the responsible and good use of the Bible. So far we have already considered two:

1. The **immediate context**. In the example of 2 Timothy 3:16, the verse is "all scripture is inspired by God," the immediate context tells us the end purpose for its use. It is for those who love God to be proficiently equipped for good works.
2. The **broader culture**. In the example of 2 Timothy again, we know that "all scripture" is different for us than it was for Timothy's early Christian community.
3. The third factor for responsible use of the Bible can be gleaned from **Jesus' teachings in the gospels**. Discuss the principles of use that the following suggest.

Matthew 5:17: [Jesus said,] 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

Matthew 22:35-40: <sup>35</sup>and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup>'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' <sup>37</sup>He said to him, ' "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup>This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

John 13:34-38 <sup>34</sup>I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

## APPLICATION

### Romans 1:26-27 – Homosexuality or Temple Prostitution?

We are going to apply the "tool kit" we have been assembling together to address one of the major texts used against gay and lesbian people. We will consider the above 3 factors for a responsible reading and use of the Bible in our church today.

*Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another (Romans 1:26-27).*

#### A. CONTEXT of Romans 1:26-27

The immediate context for the text starts at Romans 1:18 and finishes at 2:11. Starting with Romans 1:18, the author Paul talks about people who were worshipping the statues of animals as the one true God, and reasoned that since these people did not worship the one true God, the result was Romans 1:26-27 among others. Here, the audience of the letter to the Romans, because they supposedly worship the one true God, would be nodding their head to Paul's reflection. Suddenly at Romans

2:1, Paul flipped around his reflection to address this self-righteous audience: their judgmental hypocrisy and their presumption that God's mercy is only directed towards them. In the end, the immediate context around Romans 1:26-27 teaches being non-judgmental.

## B. CULTURE of Paul's letter to the Romans

There are at least two cultural elements of the ancient Greco-Roman world to consider in reading Romans 1:26-27, lest we assume that Paul and the early Christians in Rome share our understanding of sexuality and sexual behavior.

1. When Paul's audience heard his letter, they would likely have thought that Romans 1:26-27 referred to the practice of **temple prostitution** of the fertility cults in Rome. These pagan cults used temple prostitutes, men and women, to engage in both heterosexual and homosexual orgies. Paul and the Romans know nothing about sexual orientation. What is unnatural to them is the excess of these orgies.
2. The broader culture of sexuality in Paul's time came from the ancient Mediterranean and Greco-Roman worldview of **dominance and submission**. The natural order of the sex roles and behavior consists of dominant man and submissive woman, dominant free man and submissive slaves (men and women), dominant citizen and submissive foreigners. Approved sexual acts never happen between social equals, for whom there is no dominance or submission.

## C. JESUS' LOVE COMMANDMENT and Romans

- First of all, it is *irresponsible* to quote Romans 1:26-27 against mutual loving LGBT relationships, because the biblical writer knew nothing about sexual orientation.
- Second, Paul's teaching about being non-judgmental in Romans 2:1 is a reminder against any sense of feeling superior over others in sexuality and faith.
- Third, Jesus' teaching on love and mutuality counteracts any addictive, exploitative, hurtful, non-mutual relationships, heterosexual or homosexual.

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## TO CLOSE

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### CLOSING PRAYER

*A Prayer for Valuing Families Curriculum (see Appendix)*

# NURTURE & NUDGE 4: IN THE IMAGE OF GOD...

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## OUTCOMES FOR THE SESSION

- Maintain a respectful and prayerful space of learning and sharing.
- Help participants to be aware of their ways of distinguishing male and female.
- Introduce the range of variation between typical male and female.
- Celebrate God's creation and ourselves, including the complexity of gender/sex.

## Materials:

- One big candle, tealight candles, lighter or tapered candles.
- Easel and marker
- Handouts from Appendix: *Creation accounts, Semenya, Gender chart.*
- Bibles—NRSV preferred

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## TO BEGIN

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### GATHERING—Lighting the candle

The facilitator invites the participants into “a time and space of prayer and intention.”

1. Invite the participant to light a candle for

“... your own body ...

... the body that you were born with ...

and ... the body that you have become.”

2. Pass out lighters for participants to light a tealight candle.

3. Light the center candle last. Read:

**“Let us open our hearts and minds to the diversity of God’s creation and the gift of our many bodily variations:**

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness ... <sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in the image of God, in the image of God they were created; male and female God created them ... (Genesis 1:26-27)

For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:12).

## RECONNECTING

### [Option A]

The book of Genesis has two accounts of creation. In Genesis 1, the phrase male and female is used. In Genesis 2, the phrase man and woman is used. Begin by asking:

- How do you usually tell who is male and who is female?
- How do you usually tell who is man and who is woman?

Let's take a look at the case of Caster Semenya, a South African middle-distance runner who won the women's 800 meters in the World Championships in Berlin in 2009.

[Option B]

Pass out the *Creation Account* handout (see Appendix).

1. Let us apply to the creation accounts what we learned about the responsible use of the Bible from the last session. We consider three factors: (a) the immediate context (b) the broader culture, and (c) Jesus' teaching of love and mutuality.
2. Immediate context. The account of the creation of "male and female" in Genesis 1:26-27 is meant to be read together with an adjacent account in Genesis 2:22-24. This latter creation of woman from man springs from what the ancient Israelite society expected of men and women.
3. Broader culture. The ancient Israelite culture that informed the creation of woman from man in Genesis 2:22-24 was an agricultural society. Its survival depended on a consistent supply of labor through birth in an environment of high infant mortality. A normal family in ancient Israel can be seen in the examples of Abraham, Israel and Jacob. It consists of one man, multiple wives and concubines, lots of children and other male and female slaves. This is what is behind "be fruitful and multiply" in the creation of male and female according to Genesis 1:26-27.
4. Contemporary use. If the experiences of ancient Israelite society informed their understanding of what it means to be male and female for their time, what do our experiences inform us about being male and female today?
5. Let's take a look at the case of Caster Semenya, a South African middle-distance runner who won the women's 800 meters in the World Championships in Berlin in 2009.

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## ACTIVITY

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Part 1: Pass out *The Case of Caster Semenya* handout (see Appendix).

1. Allow enough time for reading. Or, you may wish to invite several to take turns reading it aloud. It is an interesting and readable story.
2. Discuss:
  - What information do you find surprising from this opinion piece ?
  - What seems to be the most significant sex characteristic according to sports ?
  - What are other questions of sex and gender that come up for you ?

Part 2: Pass out the *Gender/Sex/Sexual Classification* handout (see Appendix)

Guided Discussion:

"Do you know your **chromosomal** sex... **hormonal** sex ...and your **brain** sex ?

Who knew?! Most of us don't. We couldn't have known it was so complex, but it is. Let's go through this chart for a quick "skinny" row by row together. There are different levels at which to distinguish sex. I'll just highlight a few things":

**Chromosomes** - We all study a little genetics along the way. The typical male is represented by 46 xy, and the typical female by 46 xx. However, there is a range of variation between the two.

**Internal Gonads** - We cannot tell the difference between the sex characteristics of a fetus until the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> week. **All of us start out the same.** Sex differentiation happens over time, and variations occur. Typically males have testes; typically females have ovaries; and some babies are born with one of each, or they have the tissue of each mixed together (ovotestes).

**Hormones** - Everyone has estrogen and testosterone! All of us, men and women. It is a matter of proportion, though, and the proportion varies through the life cycle. The presence of hormone is not enough to develop our internal plumbing and external genitalia, because hormonal receptors are also needed. In the article we just read, it seems that Semenya has internal testes that produced testosterone, but there is not enough receptors to receive the hormones ("partial

androgen sensitivity”), and the internal tubes and male genitalia never developed.

**External Genitalia** - At least 4 clinically identifiable variations exist between the ‘typical’ male and female genitalia at birth.

**Brain Structure** - This is complicated and the bottom line is that there are three independently-varied neural clusters around the hypothalamus of the brain which are sexually dimorphic (i.e. bigger size in male, smaller size in female). As a result, there are at least 8 brain types between male and female.

**Gender Role Identity** - All of the above variations at different levels can contribute to the experience of gender role/identity not matching external sex characteristics.

**Orientation/Attraction** - There is a range for this as well as for the rest, human sexual orientation is a continuum that humanity clusters along, a range including exclusively straight or gay but also a range in between that includes bisexual.

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## TEACHING MOMENT

- Sexual variation is common across species. There are more than 2 sexes in humans. Some cultures recognize this variation with terms like the “third sex.”
- Sexual variation is not a biological disorder, because most traits are not painful, and the only suffering is social stigma.
- Sexual variation is not a genetic defect, because the frequency of traits like homosexuality, transgender expression, and most intersex realities are too common to be a rarity (though they may not be discussed).

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## SHARING

1. Some people say that the kinds of variation that we have been looking at are nothing more than deviations from “normal human development,” because of the low percentage in the total human population. While it is not the person’s fault that they are born this way, it is sinful behavior to express that gender identity or sexual orientation, even in love, mutuality and equality. Do you agree, or disagree? Why? Can we accept the sexual diversity and ask people to refrain from living it out?
2. Others view this kind of human sexual variation as part of natural diversity, a mystery of creation, and it is not a sin to express one’s being in love, mutuality and equality. Yet the heterosexual majority oppresses the minority that is gender-variant and non-heterosexual, even though who are also part of our families and God’s family. What do you think about this reality? How has the tonight’s discussion changed your thinking about gender and sexual identity?

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## TO CLOSE

### CLOSING PRAYER

[Option A] *A Prayer for Valuing Families Curriculum* (see Appendix)

[Option B] If the group is comfortable to praying in such a manner, invite each member to lift up a prayer out loud with regard to gaining more compassion and understanding of gender variant and non-heterosexual people.

### Suggestions for further reading:

The evolutionary biologist from Stanford, Joan Roughgarden, a church person and scientist, has written a highly readable book for church people, under 100 pages, that we commend to you: *Evolution and Christian Faith*. See especially chapter 11. More extended study is found in her volume *Evolution’s Rainbow: Diversity, Gender and Sexuality in Nature and People*.

Barbara Brown Taylor’s *The Luminous Web* is another accessible book that focuses more on the role of science and religious imagination.

Watch for an upcoming online module on “Eunuchs in the Bible,” a resource on the ancient world’s understanding of gender variation.

# NURTURE & NUDGE 5 : A SPIRITUALITY OF CHANGE

## OUTCOMES FOR THE SESSION

- Maintain a respectful and prayerful space of learning and sharing.
- Present a spiritual practice of attention to God amidst changes in one's life.
- Capacity building for participants to attend to God amidst changes in church life.
- Series overview: valuing the gift of family and church family on the spiritual journey with all its change, mystery, and opportunity to transform our communities with God's call to *Life Abundant*.

## Materials:

- One big candle, tealight candles, lighter or tapered candles.
- Easel and marker
- Bibles—NRSV preferred

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## TO BEGIN

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### GATHERING—Lighting the candles

The facilitator invites the participants into a time and space of prayer and intention

1. "We are going to light 2 candles to begin our time of study and intention."
2. "Identify a major transition in your personal lives. Without going into the details, think of a feeling word that describes how you felt before and another word for after the transition."
3. Pass out lighters for participants to light a tealight candle for those 2 feelings.
4. Light the center candle last. Read:

*Jesus said, "Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born anew." "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:7-8).*

### RECONNECTING

1. Invite participants to "reconnect" with each other by sharing one or two learnings, "take aways" or things they have appreciated from previous sessions.
2. You may want to help them recall with a quick review of the Nurture & Nudge sessions:
  - Valuing Families began with attention to **our own family web**.
  - We moved to the second session on **treating each other as church family**.
  - We looked at **responsible Christian use of the Bible**, the letter and the spirit.
  - Then we focused on the incredible variation of how **we are made in God's image**.



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## ACTIVITY

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1. Put the word CHANGE in the middle of an easel.
2. Invite the participants to focus on their own church life, whether in this congregation or in another fellowship.
3. Ask them to think of a change event that happened during their time in those groups, without saying it out loud.
4. Ask if they have any additional words for the chart.
5. Include words like: hope, loss, anxiety, excitement, uncertainty

### SCRIPTURES – Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Invite a participant, or several of them, to read from the Bible

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:  
a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;  
a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.*

### APPLICATION

At this last session of our study series, let us take time to consider what to do with what we have learned and shared about sexuality and the church. This study series may be a beginning conversation for you as a church family. It may be a result of many informal conversations. For some, it marks a change in openness concerning LGBT concerns. Still for others, this study series takes place in the midst of opposition.

Referring to Ecclesiastes' ideas of time from our scripture just now:

1. What *kind* of time is this study for our church?
2. What *kind* of time is it for this church regarding LGBT issues?
3. How did we as church get here to this present time ?
4. What are the changes/steps that have happened to lead up to now?
5. Where is God in all these things (re: LGBT issues) for you and for this community?

## MEDITATION

In the midst of the different “times” in our own lives and our lives together as church, we need to ask not just the purpose question, the strategy question, the outcome question, but also the spiritual question. Where is God in the midst of all these things? Where is God in the midst of changes? Where is God leading us regarding LGBT concerns? The hymn *Great is Thy Faithfulness says of God:*

“... with You no shadow of turning we see.  
You do not change;  
Your compassions they fail not;  
all of Your goodness for ever will be.  
Great is your faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
all I have needed your hand has provided;  
Great is your faithfulness unto me.”

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is about **changes towards the direction of God’s steadfast love** through the saving work of Jesus: release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, freedom to those oppressed (Luke 4:16-21). God’s mercies continue to unfold in front of our eyes, as our understanding of the word of God expands, and our faith changes. Sometimes, opportunities for such changes just come to the doorstep of the church e.g., the equality of women, the abolition of slavery, the fight against homophobia. [Time for sharing] *What would you and your church or group choose to do next What is your personal role in that process?*

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## TO CLOSE

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### CLOSING PRAYER– 1 Corinthians 13:12-14

*For now we see ... dimly,  
but then we will see face to face.  
Now I know only in part;  
then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.  
<sup>13</sup>And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three;  
and the greatest of these is love.*



**APPENDIX**

## A Prayer for “Valuing Families” Curriculum

Love is patient; love is kind.  
It isn't jealous, it doesn't brag.  
It isn't arrogant or disruptive;  
It doesn't insist on its own way.  
It isn't easily provoked;  
It doesn't keep a tab of wrongs.  
It doesn't gloat over injustice,  
but joins in celebrating with the truth.  
It protects all things,  
It believes in all things,  
It hopes for all things,  
It holds true to all things.  
Love never fails.

1 Corinthians 13: 4-8a,  
*From The Spoken English New Testament,*  
J. Webb Mealy

# ACCORDS

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***Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).***

***There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).***

***For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another (Romans 12:4-5).***

## Being here

- Showing up on time and not leaving early;
- Agreeing to be "here" and "now" when the community gathers;
- Turning off electronic devices (such as cell phones and pagers).

## Speaking

- Speak only for ourselves (using "I" statements);
- Speak to build up and not tear down;
- Take responsibility for our own thoughts and feelings;
- Respect the God-given dignity of every human being;
- Acknowledge our misperceptions and our insights with each other;
- Recognize that thriving communities can and often do contain multiple perspectives;
- Realize that learning often means changing one's mind about something;
- Honor confidentiality unless permission to share is explicitly given.

## Listening

- Seeking God in the experience of others;
- Accepting those experiences as valid for the speakers;
- Searching for strengths in the other's position;
- Avoiding interruptions and argument;
- Refraining from applause or other overt reactions to speakers;
- Allowing each person to speak before others speak again

## PART 1: CORNELIUS AND PETER

[Acts 10] In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort. <sup>2</sup>He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. <sup>3</sup>One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius.' <sup>4</sup>He stared at him in terror and said, 'What is it, Lord?' He answered, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. <sup>5</sup>Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; <sup>6</sup>he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside' ....

<sup>9</sup>About noon the next day, as [Cornelius' men] were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. <sup>10</sup>He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. <sup>11</sup>He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. <sup>12</sup>In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup>Then he heard a voice saying, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' <sup>14</sup>But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.' <sup>15</sup>The voice said to him again, a second time, '**What God has made clean, you must not call profane.**' <sup>16</sup>This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

<sup>17</sup>Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared ... <sup>19</sup>While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Look, three men are searching for you. <sup>20</sup>Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.' <sup>21</sup>So Peter went down to the men and said, 'I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?' <sup>22</sup>They answered, 'Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.'

<sup>23</sup>So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging. The next day he got up and went with them ... <sup>25</sup>On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshipped him. <sup>26</sup>But Peter made him get up, saying, 'Stand up; I am only a mortal' ... and found that many had assembled; <sup>28</sup>and he said to them, 'You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but **God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.** <sup>29</sup>So when I was sent for, I came without objection.

## PART 2 – PETER’S RESPONSE TO HIS CRITICS

[Acts 11] Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. <sup>2</sup>So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, <sup>3</sup>saying, ‘Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?’ <sup>4</sup>Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step ...

<sup>15</sup>And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup>And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>17</sup> **If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?** <sup>18</sup>When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, ‘Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.’

## PART 3 – PETER VS. JAMES AT THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

[Acts 15] <sup>156</sup> <sup>6</sup> The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. <sup>7</sup>After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, ‘My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. <sup>8</sup>And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as God did to us; <sup>9</sup>and **in cleansing their hearts by faith God has made no distinction between them and us.** <sup>10</sup>**Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?** <sup>11</sup>On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.’ <sup>12</sup> The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles.

<sup>13</sup>After they finished speaking, James replied, ‘My brothers, listen to me. <sup>14</sup>Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name ... <sup>19</sup>**Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God,** <sup>20</sup>**but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood.** <sup>21</sup>For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues.’

## CASE STUDY: THE USE OF THE BIBLE TO SUPPORT SLAVERY

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Slavery has been abolished in this country since the 1800s. However, once upon a time, the bible was not used against slavery. Instead, good Christian people considered slavery to be an institution sanctioned by God and the good work of such an institution supported by the Bible:

"I propose to examine the sacred volume briefly, and if I am not greatly mistaken, I shall be able to make it appear that the institution of slavery has received, in the first place, 1st, the sanction of the Almighty in the patriarchal age. 2d. that it was incorporated into the only National Constitution which ever emanated from God. 3d. that its legality was recognized, and its duties regulated, by Jesus Christ in his kingdom."—*Thornton Stringfellow, Methodist, 1856*

Genesis 9:20-27 Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. <sup>21</sup>He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent. <sup>22</sup>And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside ... <sup>24</sup>When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, <sup>25</sup>he said, 'Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.' <sup>26</sup>He also said, 'Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. <sup>27</sup>May God make space for<sup>2</sup> Japheth, and let him live in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.'

Leviticus 25: 44-46 As for the male and female slaves whom you may have, it is from the nations around you that you may acquire male and female slaves. <sup>45</sup>You may also acquire them from among the aliens residing with you, and from their families that are with you, who have been born in your land; and they may be your property. <sup>46</sup>You may keep them as a possession for your children after you, for them to inherit as property. These you may treat as slaves, but as for your fellow Israelites, no one shall rule over the other with harshness.

1 Timothy 6:1 Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed.

Ephesians 6:5-8 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ<sup>6</sup>.

### CONSIDER & DISCUSS

Verses supporting slavery still remain in the Bible today, but we do not emphasize "this is what the Bible says" and accept slavery as good and legal. Instead, we emphasize that there is no longer slave or free in Christ (Gal 3:28). We point to the powerful anti-slavery motif in Exodus. We lift up Paul's letter to Philemon as to how Paul "anticipates" the abolition of slavery.

1. What has changed? The Bible? The user of the Bible?
2. Why is it that we can justify that change in emphasis?
3. What good works have been achieved in society as a result of the change?

Matthew 5.17: [Jesus said,]'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. **22:35-40** <sup>35</sup>and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup>'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' <sup>37</sup>He said to him, ' "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup>This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

John 13.34-38 <sup>34</sup>I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'



## CREATION ACCOUNT #1 [GENESIS 1]

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, "Let us make humankind (*adam*) in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." <sup>27</sup>So God created humankind (*adam*) in God's image, in the image of God they were created; male and female (*zakar uneqebah*) God created them. <sup>28</sup>God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

## CREATION ACCOUNT #2 [GENESIS 2]

<sup>7</sup>Then the Lord God formed man (*adam*) from the dust of the ground (*adamah*), and breathed into nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being ...<sup>15</sup>The Lord God took the man (*adam*) and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it ...<sup>22</sup>And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man God made into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup>Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman (*'ishah*), for out of Man (*'ish*) this one was taken." <sup>24</sup>Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

## THE CASE OF CASTER SEMENYA

**The South African runner won a world championship—then came questions about her sex.**

Los Angeles Times - September 17, 2009 | MEGHAN DAUM

Magazine or TV makeovers are frequently as queasy-making as they are jaw-dropping. Whether the transformation involves weight loss, a new haircut, wardrobe, nose, or some combination thereof, the end result might have you going back to the “before” picture and wondering if more harm than good has been done.

This was exactly the case last week when South Africa’s *You* magazine featured a cover story about Caster Semenya, the 18-year-old South African middle-distance runner who won the women’s 800 meters in the World Championships in Berlin last month by an astonishing 2.45 seconds. Semenya immediately fell under gender scrutiny amid reports of her elevated testosterone levels and the aggrieved charges of fellow runners. Is she a man or a woman, race officials and the public wondered, as Semenya, under the orders of the International Association of Athletics Federation, began a series of gender tests. In the meantime, *You* magazine dressed her in stilettos, applied many layers of makeup and attributed to her such quotes as, “Now that I know what I can look like, I’d like to dress like this more often” and “I’d also like to learn to do my own makeup.”

The test results were leaked to the media last week, and they showed Semenya is actually intersex, meaning she has both male and female characteristics. Newspaper reports said she has internal testicles and lacks ovaries or a uterus. Semenya disappeared from public view and withdrew from a race she was scheduled to run last weekend. Meanwhile, IAAF officials are deciding whether she should be stripped of her title because her natural testosterone levels might afford her an unfair advantage in the women’s competition.

Intersex conditions exist on a spectrum, with some people possessing obvious physical characteristics of both genders and others so apparently “normal” that they’re not even aware of their condition (which appears to have been the case with Semenya, despite her deep voice and other masculine cues). As many questions as Semenya’s case raises within the arena of athletics (and hers is not the first such case; in 2006, an intersex runner from India was stripped of a medal and later attempted suicide), it poses even more about maleness and femaleness in general.

Society, in large part, has grown accustomed to thinking

about race, religion and even sexual identity in more than just binary terms—recognizing that people may be black and white, Catholic and Buddhist, even transgender—but being both sexes at once?

As it happens, however, Semenya’s condition is hardly unheard of. According to data from the Intersex Society of North America, the number of people “whose bodies differ from standard male or female” account for one in 100 births, and babies that get surgery “to ‘normalize’ genital appearance” account for one or two in every 1,000 births. Some have speculated that Semenya’s particular condition is something called partial androgen insensitivity syndrome, which occurs in one of every 130,000 births. You do the math: In its most common form, being born intersex is rare but not vanishingly rare; by some measures, it’s on the order of being born with red hair.

But that doesn’t make Semenya’s case any less troubling, poignant or compelling. Maybe that’s because it reinforces gender stereotypes even as it appears to defy them. For those who champion women’s potential and their equality with men, it was exciting to see the powerful Semenya win a race by a wide margin. But to learn that this woman won—for lack of a better way of putting it—because she competed at least partly on male terms sours the whole experience. It seems unfair to the other female runners, and worse, it forces a recognition of the irreducible fact that male hormones make you more physically powerful than female ones.

This may be obvious—and let’s be reasonable, it’s not anything to get terribly upset over—but there is something oddly deflating about being reminded once again just how unequal the sexes can be. Through no fault of her own—and clearly the athlete herself didn’t set out to deceive anyone—Semenya performed a bait and switch. She made us think we were looking at a superwoman, only to learn later that her superness was dependent on a significant measure of masculinity. And her handlers, instead of giving the public time to digest the truth, exacerbated the feelings of betrayal by allowing her to be put on a magazine cover looking like a caricature of femininity.

In so doing, an athlete who had started to open people’s eyes caused many to turn away in embarrassment. If I were Semenya, I wouldn’t be planning to wear stilettos more often. I’d be getting ready to throw them.

## RANGE OF VARIATION

|                                   |                              | “Typical Male”  | “Typical Female”         |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Gender/Sex /Sexual Classification | Chromosomes                  | 46 xy ... 47 xyy... 47xxy...48xxyy...47xxx ...46xx/xy mosaic....46 xx   |                          |
|                                   | Internal Gonads              | 2 Testes ..... ovotestes ; 1 testicle & 1 ovary ..... 2 ovaries   |                          |
|                                   | Hormones                     | dihydrotestosterone ← testosterone → estradiol ↔ estrogen   |                          |
|                                   | External Genitalia           | “Typical M” ..... (at least 4 variants in between) ..... “Typical F”  |                          |
|                                   | Brain Structure <sup>1</sup> | 8 brain types identified according to three independently varied, sexually dimorphic (male: big; female: small) neural clusters around hypothalamus |                          |
|                                   | Gender Role, Identity        | masculine ..... feminine<br>“typical man.....Transgender.....”typical” woman  |                          |
|                                   | Orientation, Attraction      | Kinsey scale  |                          |
|                                   | exclusively homosexual ..... | bisexual .....  | exclusively heterosexual |

<sup>1</sup> Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender and Sexuality in Nature and People* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2009), 240.

# VALUING FAMILIES CURRICULUM

## EVALUATION FORM

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What would you say was most helpful about this program ?

What aspect of this program was most difficult for you?

Name one thing or more you learned in this program which has been helpful.

What suggestions would you give us to improve this program?

How will this program change

a. your relationship with LGBT people in your community ?

b. your seeking justice and equality for LGBT people?

Other comments::

**Thank You!**

**May we include you on our mailing list? If so, please fill out the following :**

Yes, please include me on your mailing list     No thanks

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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