

# Religious Organizations and Sexual Orientation

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Religion has been a source of both comfort and suffering for many in the LGBT community. While most have been raised in an organized religion, and many continue in their faith, too many have been forced to leave those communities behind because of condemnation of LGBT people. In recent years, a growing number of organized religious groups in the US have issued statements officially welcoming LGBT people as members.

To find out about the stands that different religious organizations have taken with regards to LGBT parishioners, same-sex unions, openly gay clergy, and other relevant issues of today, visit the Human Rights Campaign's website at <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/faith-positions>.

## **Major Denominations and their current positions**

**(It should be noted there are dissenting views within each religion and between leaders within the same denomination.)**

**Roman Catholic Church** – Permits openly gay people to join and participate fully in the church. Does not consider gay or lesbian orientation to be wrong because it is not a choice. Teaches that any sexual activity outside marriage is wrong. Gay and lesbians are expected to remain celibate for life.

**Baptist** - Considers homosexuality a sin, but officially lets openly gay people join, although there are differing views between the American Baptists and Southern Baptists, and individual churches are autonomous. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) even goes so far as to express antipathy not only for gay and lesbian people but also for any individual or institution that acknowledges, accepts, or supports them. The SBC insists that gay and lesbian people remain celibate, or, more commonly, change their orientation through prayer and controversial reparative techniques (which have been judged unproven and potentially harmful by several professional associations).

**United Methodist Church** – Permits openly gay people to join and does not officially consider homosexuality a sin, but homosexual activity is considered incompatible with Christian teaching and therefore a sin. Supports basic human rights and civil liberties for all gay and lesbian people. Ministers are forbidden from blessing gay and lesbian unions, although a group of Methodist ministers has declared that they will perform same gender unions. Non-celibate gay and lesbian people may not be ordained as ministers.

**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)** - Recently announced that it would allow churches to decide if they would like to have a clergy member who openly identifies as lesbian or gay. The ELCA also voted in favor of allowing churches to determine if the pastor would be able to perform same-sex commitment ceremonies.

**The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)** – Does not let openly gay people join and considers homosexuality a sin. Recommends chastity for gays and lesbians. Argues that those who feel attracted to someone of the same sex are either misguided or willfully sinful. Members are taught to resist and repent of all feelings, thoughts and acts based on same-sex attraction and are urged to undergo controversial reparative therapy counseling.

**United Church of Christ (UCC)** - Has been one of the most accepting religious groups of LGBT people, although not every church in the denomination is supportive. The church's General Synod recently endorsed full civil and religious marriage rights for same-sex couples.

**Orthodox Judaism** – Does not recognize a gay or lesbian orientation and rejects sexual relations between gay and lesbian people as sinful.

**Conservative Judaism** – Does not consider a gay or lesbian orientation sinful. Openly welcomes gay and lesbian members. Supports nondiscrimination policies against gay and lesbian people in civil society. Does not support the blessing of gay and lesbian unions, accept only gay and lesbian seminary students, or condone the ordination of gay or lesbian rabbis.

**Reform Judaism** – Does not consider a gay or lesbian orientation sinful. Openly welcomes gay and lesbian members. Supports nondiscrimination policies against gay and lesbian people. Supports the rights of gay and lesbian people to be married. Accepts openly gay and lesbian seminary students. Permits rabbis to bless gay and lesbian couples.

**Reconstructionist Judaism** – Holds the same position as the Reform Movement except that it is also officially sanctions the blessing of gay and lesbian unions and considers them the equivalent of heterosexual marriages.

**Presbyterian Church** – Welcomes gay and lesbian people and condemns those who would judge or mistreat them. Expresses opposition to any federal, state, and local legislation that discriminates against person on the basis of sexual orientation. Does not prohibit the blessing of gay and lesbian unions. Forbids the ordination of non-celibate gay and lesbian ministers.

