

Becoming an LGBTQ Ally in Your Faith Community

best practices for welcoming persons into sacred spaces



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This guide shares best practices on being an ally with people who are LGBTQ in your faith community.

There are five main points in the guide. The first section describes what pronouns are and offers a detailed explanation as to why they are important. In section two, the term “misgendering” is defined along with steps for reconciling and moving forward after misgendering someone. The third section shares various terms to avoid and other terms to use. The fourth section examines bathroom equality for LGBTQ people, followed by the fifth section, which looks at nondiscrimination protections for individuals who are LGBTQ.

Before we examine the content, let’s review three basic terms and their meanings:

Assigned sex at birth is determined by doctors based on the external anatomy of an infant.

Gender identity is a person’s internal sense of self. Someone assigned male at birth could identify as a woman, and someone assigned female at birth could identify as a man. Furthermore, sometimes people have gender identities that are neither male nor female.

Gender expression is the way a person acts, dresses, speaks, and behaves (i.e., feminine, masculine, androgynous). Gender expression does not necessarily correspond to assigned sex at birth or gender identity.

It is crucial to know and understand the differences between these terms for many reasons. For example, opponents of bathroom access for transgender people often cite assigned sex at birth while disregarding the individual’s gender identity and gender expression.

Table of Contents

Introduction	page 2
Misgendering	page 3
Best practices in LGBTQ terminology	page 4
What pronouns are and why they matter	page 6
Bathroom equality for LGBTQ people	page 7
Nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ people	page 7
Moving forward	page 8
Welcoming movements	page 9
References	page 10

Trigger Warning: This guide includes terms and topics that may be upsetting to the reader.

Misgendering

Before we discuss misgendering, it is important we understand what it is. Misgendering occurs when you intentionally or unintentionally refer to a person, relate to a person, or use language to describe a person that doesn't align with their affirmed gender. For example, referring to a woman as 'he' or calling her a 'guy' is an act of misgendering. When misgendering occurs, there are ways we can handle the situation to provide the best possible outcome.

Here are guidelines for how to move forward:

1. If you accidentally misgender someone, correct yourself, apologize, and move on. Do not extend the apology by:

- speaking about the difficulty of pronouns,
- ruminating over the effort being put in, or
- discussing how guilty you feel.

Prolonging the apology can make the other person feel very uncomfortable and this could increase the harm done.



2. Be mindful of the fact that someone's outward appearance is not a reliable guide to their gender or pronouns. If you are unsure of someone's gender, default to using their name or the gender-neutral, singular "they."
3. Always use a person's preferred pronouns, no matter who is around. By doing this, you will help uphold an atmosphere of respect for all individuals. This helps create and maintain a climate in which it is safe for everyone to share their identity and preferred pronouns.
4. Regardless of your gender identity, please consider including your pronouns when introducing yourself to a new person, in your email signature, and with other opportunities. This normalizes the practice of sharing one's pronouns.

By following these steps, we can make our spaces comfortable and safer for everyone. Our efforts to be more

inclusive will make a positive impact for all people who use pronouns differing from their assigned sex at birth. It's important to remember everyone uses pronouns and we need to respect preferred pronouns in order to show respect for others.



Best practices in LGBTQ terminology

The following terminology charts provide insight on terms to use and those to avoid.

What we should and shouldn't say about SEXUALITIES (Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual):

What to say	How to say it	What not to say	Why not to say it
Gay (adjective) Lesbian (noun or adjective) Bisexual (adjective)	"Gay people" "Gay man/men" "Lesbian couple" "Bisexual people"	"Homosexual" "Gay" (as in, "They are a gay.")	Anti-LGBTQ people often use "homosexual" to stigmatize gay people and minimize their lives to sexual terms. Saying "they are a gay" is grammatically incorrect. <i>Gay</i> is an adjective, not a noun.
Being Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual	"They talked about being gay/a lesbian/bisexual." "They discussed being bisexual."	"Homosexuality" "Lesbianism" "That's so gay"	Discussing someone's "homosexuality" reduces that person's life down to sexual terms. Instead, talk about being gay/a lesbian/bisexual. The term "lesbianism" is considered offensive, as is using "gay" as an insult or hurtful slur.
Sexual Orientation Orientation	"A person's sexual orientation." "Sexual orientation can be a complex topic. A person's orientation is..."	"Sexual preference" "Gay/lesbian/bisexual lifestyle" "Same-sex attractions" "Sexual identity"	"Sexual preference" implies being LGBTQ is a choice that can be changed. Being LGBTQ is not a choice. The term "lifestyle" is used to stigmatize LGBTQ people. You wouldn't talk about a "straight lifestyle;" in the same way, use the term "orientation" rather than "LGBTQ lifestyle."



What we should and shouldn't say about GENDER IDENTITIES:

What to say	How to say it	What not to say	Why not to say it
Transgender (adjective)	<p>"Transgender man"</p> <p>"Transgender woman"</p> <p>"Transgender person"</p>	<p>"Transgendered"</p> <p>"A transgender"</p> <p>"Transgenders"</p> <p>"A trans"</p> <p>"Transvestite"</p> <p>"Transexual"</p> <p>"Tranny"</p>	<p>Transgender is an adjective, not a noun. Be careful not to call someone "a transgender" or "a trans." Do not add an unnecessary "-ed" to the term (i.e., "transgendered"), which connotes a condition of some kind.</p> <p>The last three terms are considered to be offensive by many people in the trans community and should not be used. However, note that some may use "tranny," as it has been reclaimed by the gender nonconforming community.</p> <p>If you don't know someone's pronouns, it is best to use they/ them. It is harmful to assume a person's pronouns, as you could misgender them.</p>
Gender Identity Gender Expression	"Fair and equal treatment based on gender identity and gender expression."	"Sexual identity"	Use the term "gender identity" rather than "sexual identity," as they are two completely different things.
Transition	"A transgender person grows up knowing they don't identify with their gender as they were raised, so they transition to live as their true gender identity."	<p>"Sex change"</p> <p>"Sex-change operation"</p> <p>"Pre-operative" and/or</p> <p>"Post-operative"</p>	"Transition" is the accurate term that does not fixate on a person's anatomy or on surgeries, which many transgender people do not or cannot undergo.
Non-Binary Someone who doesn't identify as either a man or a woman	"I'm non-binary. Most people know throughout childhood that they're either a man or a woman, but that wasn't true for me."	<p>"Do you lean more towards a man or woman?"</p> <p>"Are you sure you're non-binary? You look more like a woman to me."</p> <p>"Were you assigned male or female at birth?"</p>	<p>Non-binary people have a wide range of experiences. Asking them to say which way they lean isn't appropriate. No one is required to present a particular way to be valid. There is no specific look that fits the non-binary experience.</p> <p>Asking non-binary persons what they were assigned at birth can be offensive. By asking this, some non-binary people feel it is a new way of attaching them to the gender binary. Trust that a non-binary person will share their assigned gender at birth if they so choose.</p>

Source: (M.A.P., 2020)

What pronouns are and why they matter

A pronoun is a way we can refer to someone rather than using their name. Common examples include: He/Him/His, She/Her/Hers, They/Them/Theirs, Ze/Zir/Zirs, She/They, and He/They.

Each person has a different way of defining and expressing their gender identity. It is impossible to know someone's pronouns based on how they express their gender identity. An individual's gender pronouns should never be assumed. Learning and applying a person's pronouns correctly is a way to respect them and their gender identity.

Here's one example for using pronouns in an inclusive manner:

"Hi, my name is _____ and my pronouns are _____."

This simple introduction encourages another person to provide you with their pronouns should they feel comfortable in sharing them. In the event someone chooses to not share their gender pronouns, always use gender neutral pronouns such as they/them/theirs.

Although gender neutral pronouns can be confusing for people who are new to using them, it is important we set aside our own uncomfortableness and show our respect for the other individual. When we put in the effort to be inclusive of all people and their preferred pronouns, we provide a safe, affirming, positive experience for the people around us.

It takes time and perhaps a bit of practice.



Here are some correct ways to use PRONOUNS, including non-gendered pronouns, when referring to another person:

	She/Her/Hers	He/Him/His	They/Them/Theirs	Ze/Zir/Zirs
Subject	She is running.	He is running.	They are running	Ze is running.
Object	Her appointment is tomorrow.	His appointment is tomorrow.	Their appointment is tomorrow.	Zir appointment is tomorrow.
Possessive	The book is hers.	The book is his.	The book is theirs.	The book is zirs.
Reflexive	She looked at herself in the mirror.	He looked at himself in the mirror.	They looked at themselves in the mirror.	Ze looked at zirself in the mirror.

Source: (U.C.S.C Title IX Office, n.d.)



Bathroom equality for LGBTQ people

For years, bathroom access for transgender people has been a highly contested topic. There have been hundreds of pieces of legislation in states across the country designed to restrict access in 2022 alone. Iowa legislators proposed several bathroom bills in 2022 but the bills failed to pass. Freedom for All, a national organization working for LGBTQ equality, created an [online tracker for all anti-LGBTQ bills](#). Their website provides information on proposed bills as well as legislation that passed or failed to pass at the federal and state levels.

Opponents will often tell you that restricting access to bathrooms based on a person's gender assigned at birth is a safety issue and paints transgender people as a threat. This couldn't be further from the truth. When transgender people are using a public bathroom, it is actually their safety that is at an increased risk. The danger is even higher when they can't access the bathroom that aligns with their gender identity and gender expression. Research shows transgender persons are victimized in the bathroom more than four times the rate of cisgender people. When transgender people can't access the proper bathroom, it is much more likely they will be victimized.



Transgender people simply want to be able to access the bathroom and feel relatively safe when doing so. This story is from a trans woman who shares her experience with using the correct bathroom at a university:

I never felt safe using the men's restrooms. After I became a survivor, I felt even more scared about using men's restrooms as an extremely feminine woman. With encouragement from a mentor, I entered the women's restroom by myself. I was so scared that I would be called out and potentially harmed. I will never forget experiencing the peace, cleanliness, and quietness of the restroom that initial time. For the first time in months, I felt like I could catch my breath. I was still anxious about hostility, but one day someone walked up to me and complimented my hair. It may sound simple, but it was a pivotal experience that helped me feel comfortable. Over time, my confidence in using the restroom has increased. I typically wear a face mask because it protects me from hateful people that try to perceive my gender identity. From my personal experience, these people often think that you're a man based on characteristics like facial hair, facial structure, and a low voice. I know many cisgender women with low voices and facial hair. For this reason, I know that criterion is incorrect, but the face mask still protects me. I don't wear my mask if I know it's a safe place, or if I walk into the restroom with a friend. The risk of violence sits in my mind as I personally know many trans sisters who have been violently assaulted in women's restrooms.

There are legal protections in Iowa for all people when using the bathroom, including people who are transgender. However, proposed laws would impact transgender people and could make it illegal for transgender individuals to use the restroom that aligns with their gender identity. This significantly hurts trans individuals and their ability to live a safe life. Additionally, discrimination against LGBTQ people is still legal in many other states. It is important we advocate for nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ individuals.

Nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ people

Iowa has excellent civil rights laws protecting equality in the areas of housing, employment, credit, education, and public accommodations for LGBTQ Iowans. However, as discriminatory laws are passed around the country or proposed in Iowa, we must fight to keep the equal rights currently provided to LGBTQ individuals.

What you should know in advocating for LGBTQ rights:

- Most Americans are already protected by federal law from discrimination based on their race,

ethnicity, sex, religion, and other characteristics. Some existing protections under federal law need to include and protect LGBTQ people from discrimination.

- Polls consistently show people are not aware it's legal in most states to fire, refuse to hire, deny housing, and/or deny public accommodations to LGBTQ persons. This is why nondiscrimination protections are desperately needed at the federal level so all people are treated fairly and equally no matter where they are/reside.
- Since many people don't know it is legal in most states to discriminate against LGBTQ people, they often wonder if this discrimination actually occurs. Talk with others about nondiscrimination laws as something to protect LGBTQ individuals. These laws safeguard people who are LGBTQ from discrimination based on housing, employment, and access to public services.
- Many people question whether nondiscrimination protections can help change how people treat one another. Remember, these laws are an important tool to help ensure fairness and opportunity for all. Changing the laws across the nation won't end unfair treatment overnight, but it will provide one more tool to ensure all LGBTQ people are treated fairly and equally.

Moving forward

There are three steps you can take to be an active advocate within your faith community:

1. Use your voice by advocating for public policies that positively impact the LGBTQ community. Additionally, you can speak out against proposed discriminatory policies that target LGBTQ people.
2. Provide an open and affirming space so LGBTQ individuals know they can safely worship. Be clear about where your faith community stands so everyone who worships there knows it's a safe space.
3. Research, discuss, and implement ways to be even more welcoming to LGBTQ people within your faith community. This could look like gender neutral bathrooms, having open conversations about how to be welcoming, and preaching about your welcoming space from the pulpit.



When we work together to welcome LGBTQ persons into sacred spaces, it benefits us all.



Welcoming Movements

Almost every faith tradition and denomination has a group within it working for the full equality of its lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members. Contact these groups for additional resources specific to your faith tradition.



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AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA

Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists | www.awab.org

BRETHREN, MENNONITE

Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests | www.bmclgbt.org

CATHOLIC

Dignity USA | www.dignityusa.org

CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)

Gay Lesbian + Affirming Disciples | www.gladalliance.org

EPISCOPAL CHURCH USA

Integrity | www.integrityusa.org

JEWISH

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism | <https://rac.org/issues/lgbtq-equality>

LUTHERAN

Reconciling Works | www.reconcilingworks.org

MORMON

Affirmation | <http://affirmation.org>

MUSLIM

Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity (MASGD) | <https://www.themasgd.org/>

PRESBYTERIAN USA

More Light Presbyterians | www.mlp.org

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

Room For All | <http://roomforall.com>

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST

Kinship International | www.sdakinship.org

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION

LGBTQ Welcome and Equality | <https://www.uua.org/lgbtq>

Coalition of UU State Action Networks | <https://cuusan.org/>

Interweave | <http://www.interweaveuu.org>

Side with Love public advocacy campaign | <https://sidewithlove.org/>

Transgender Religious professional UUs Together (TRUUsT) | <https://transuu.org/>

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Ministries | www.ucc.org/lgbt/

UCC Open and Affirming | <https://openandaffirming.org/>

UNITED METHODIST

Reconciling Ministries Network | www.rmnetwork.org

UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

Metropolitan Community Churches | <https://insidemcc.org/>

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Our Mission: Interfaith Alliance of Iowa & Action Fund convene and lead diverse voices to challenge extremism, defend democracy, protect religious freedom, and safeguard the rights of all Iowans.