

# Queers (BGLTQ), Religion & Ministry

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## Course Facilitator

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## Course description

This course explores queer theory, sexual orientation, and gender identity in religion and ministry. It studies the lives and theologies of bisexual, gay, lesbian, transgender and questioning (BGLTQ) people, their religious history, and their current situations. It focuses on the major western religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and includes Buddhism, Hinduism (Yoga), Paganism, and Native American traditions. It incorporates African American and Hispanic American religious experiences. ALL religious leaders will develop resources for ministry with BGLTQ congregants. BGLTQ people will explore their sexual orientation/gender identity impact on their ministries. The course will wrap up with broader conversations about inclusion, welcoming, sexuality, pastoral care, etc.

## Student Learning Outcomes

Students will learn the following in this course:

1. To define and counter homophobia in themselves, in the church, and in society,
2. To articulate the psycho-social-emotional experiences of BGLTIQ people (Queers) in religious congregations,
3. To discuss the most commonly used scriptural verses and theologies to exclude Queers from religious life
4. To develop a theology of Queer inclusion in the church, the beloved community, and in society-at-large
5. To explain the role of Queer congregants and Queer ministers (or seminarians) in the systemic dynamics of congregations
6. To develop an ministry project that address an important issue for Queer congregants or ministers

## Readings

Catherine Lake, ed. Recreations: Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of Queer People. Toronto: Queer Press, 1999. (Includes all religious traditions: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Pagan, etc.)

Walter Wink, ed. Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999.

Elizabeth Stuart. Gay & Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions With Critical Difference. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003

UUA. The Welcoming Congregation Handbook: Resources for Affirming Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and/or Transgender People. Boston: UUA, 1999.

David J. Kundtz and Bernard S. Schlager. Ministry Among God's Queer Folk: LGBT Pastoral Care. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2007.

Gary D. Comstock and Susan E. Henking, eds. Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology. New York: Continuum, 1999. (Includes all religious traditions: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Pagan, etc.) **BUY A USED COPY FROM AN ONLINE BOOKSELLER FOR 10-20% OF THE COVER PRICE (\$85)!**

Called Out: Ministry of and to LGBT Christians. CTS Register. Summer 2002 (vol. 92, no. 2). PDF.

### Recommended Reading

Winston Leyland, ed. Queer Dharma: Voice of Gay Buddhists. Vol 2. San Francisco: Sunshine, 2000.

Rev. Jeff Miner and John Tyler Connoley. The Children are Free; Reexamining the Biblical Evidence on Same-Sex Relationships. Indianapolis, IN: Jesus MCC, 2002.

Recommended for MCC.

Gary David Comstock. A Whosoever Church: Welcoming Lesbians and Gay Men into African American Congregations. Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Justin Edward Tanis. Trans-Gendered: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003.

Leanne McCall Tigert and Maren C. Tirabassi. Transgendering Faith: Identity, Sexuality, And Spirituality. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2004.

### Movies

Sandi Simcha Dubowski, dir. Trembling before G-d. Simcha Leib Productions: 2001.

Daniel Karlake, dir. For the Bible Tells Me So. First Run Features: 2008.

Parvez Sharma, dir. A Jihad of Love. Halal Films: 2007.

### Topics/Weeks

1. Introduction to course, Queer theory, and Queer/BGLT people

Readings: Lake, Introduction;

Wink, Introduction;

Kundtz/Schlager, Introduction;

Stuart, "Theological Trouble"

On-line introductions & discussion

2. Witness: Queers from various religious and racial backgrounds speak about their current participation in religion

Readings: Lake, "Witness;"

Wink, Part One "Personal Encounters"

Recommended: Tigert/Tirabassi, Part 1 "The Basics for Everyone;"

Comstock Part 1 "Paving the Way"

On-line discussion

3. History: the religious locus that Queers held historically in Classical European Paganism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Native American Religion  
Readings: Comstock/Henking, Part 1 “History”  
On-line discussion
  
4. Scripture, Myth, and Interpretation: the varying views from Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Pagan sacred texts. Addresses the 7 biblical bullet texts cited against homosexuality.  
Readings: Comstock/Henking, Part 4 “Scripture and Myth;”  
Wink, Part 2 “Biblical Witness.”  
Recommended: Miner/Connoley (required for MCC seminarians)  
Tanis, chapter 3 “Gender Variance and the Scriptures”  
On-line discussion
  
5. Exile: Queers discuss their exclusion from religion, ex-Gay ministries, and their grief/reintegration process  
Readings: Lake, “Exile”  
Recommended: Comstock, Part 2 “Charting the Course”  
On-line discussion  
Interview due
  
6. Traditions: Queers find their place in religion today  
Readings: Comstock/Henking, Part 2 “Tradition”  
On-line discussion
  
7. Sanctuary: Queers find haven in liberal denominations and New Religious Movements today  
Readings: Lake, “Sanctuary;”  
Recommended: Tigert/Tirabassi, Part 2 “In Our Own Voices”  
Comstock, Part 3 “Making the Connections”  
On-line discussion  
Midterm paper  
Note: the class will divide into 3 groups before the reading week. Each group will watch 1 of the 3 movies (see week 8) during reading week. The groups will report on their movies during week 8. This gives you 2-3 weeks to complete the assignment.  
Note 2: you are ENCOURAGED to think about/work on your final ministry paper/project proposal during reading week

## Reading Week

8. Culture and Society: Queers que(e)ry (challenge) religious establishments on their BGLT stances  
Readings: Comstock/Henking, Part 3 “Culture and Society”  
Movies: Sandi Simcha Dubowski, dir. Trembling before G-d. Simcha Leib Productions: 2001.  
Daniel Karlake, dir. For the Bible Tells Me So. First Run Features: 2008.  
Parvez Sharma, dir. A Jihad of Love. Halal Films: 2007.

On-line discussion

9. Queer Theology: Queers redefine the religious tradition  
Readings: Stuart, chapters 2-8  
Recommended: Tanis, chapter 6 “Transgender People and God;” chapter 8 “Transgendered Body Theology,” chapter 9 “Transgendered Theological Thought”  
On-line discussion
10. Conscience: The challenges for (liberal and conservative) congregations to accept & affirm Queers  
Readings: Wink, Parts 3-6  
Lotus Sutra, chapter 12 “Devadatta”  
([http://lotus.nichirenshu.org/lotus/sutra/english/watson/lsw\\_chap12.htm](http://lotus.nichirenshu.org/lotus/sutra/english/watson/lsw_chap12.htm) or  
<http://www.mandala.hr/3/lotus-sutra.html#twelve>)  
Recommended: Comstock, part 4 “Reflection and Prophecy”  
On-line discussion  
Theology paper due
11. Welcoming Congregations; Institute for Welcoming Resources: UUA, other denominational and inter-denominational approaches for including & affirming Gay and Lesbian persons in congregations  
Readings: The Welcoming Congregation Handbook  
On-line discussion  
Ministry paper/project proposal due
12. Living the Welcoming Congregation: the UU program to expanding sensibilities for including & affirming Bisexual and Transgender individuals in the life of the church; Beyond Categorical Thinking: promoting inclusivity & preventing discrimination in the ministerial search process  
Readings: <http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/livingwelcoming/index.shtml> (a PDF should be available sometime during the summer);  
<http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/beyondcategorical/92138.shtml>  
Recommended: Tanis, chapter 4 “transgendered People and Faith Communities,” chapter 5 “Creating a Genuine Welcome for Trans people on Communities of Faith”  
On-line discussion
13. Pastoral Care  
Readings: Kundtz/Schalger, chapters 3-4  
Called Out (PDF)  
On-line discussion
14. Conclusion  
Readings: Kundtz/Schalger, chapters 5-6  
On-line discussion  
Ministry paper/project proposal due

## **Student Expectations**

Weekly discussion forum postings & participation; an interview with the BGLT minister on their religious and ministerial journey; a short paper developing and defining queer theology for the student; and a longer paper/project on the service of ministry with BGLT people.

**Weekly discussions**

**Interview**

**Theology paper**

**Ministry paper/project**

## **Starr King's Threshold Area**

2) Prophetic Witness and Work. The course guides participants in their exploration of their own sensibilities regarding BGLT issues and people. They then develop an informed, affirmative religious and social response to include BLGT people in the life of the church and society.

## **Starr King's Commitment to Educating to Counter Oppressions and Create Just and Sustainable Communities**

This course focuses on ministry with historically marginalized groups, for both ministers and congregants. It examines the religious oppression of sexual and gender minorities and their burgeoning liberation in religious and social life. It proclaims a prophetic witness for full inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in church and society. It counters heterosexual supremacy. It serves the common good by not only seeking to end discrimination and prejudice, but also to include sexual and gender minorities as equal members of our world.

## **Special attention to educating students from historically marginalized social locations in their preparation for religious leadership**

This course includes a focus on the historically marginalized group of GLBT people in their preparation for ministry. It prepares them to face the overt and latent prejudices they may and do encounter, and to grapple with their own internalized homophobia. It also reviews the intersection of race and GLBT issues that often challenge GLBT people of color through dual discrimination.

## **Something about your preparation for offering a course on this subject matter...**

I have taken several graduate & ministerial courses in BGLT and Queer studies. I have developed and deployed an undergraduate BGLT studies course. I have completed interfaith Welcoming Congregation Training. This will be my first course on BLGT ministry. I am a Gay white male UU minister. I lead efforts in my previous denomination (Lithuanian Church Romuva) to adopt its BLG inclusion policy. I was a participant of the Illinois religious efforts to pass BGLT Equal Rights legislation in the early 2000s. For the past couple of years, I have been leading the Illinois Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry, an interfaith network of ministers and congregations seeking marriage equality in Illinois. I have taught a number of

undergraduate and graduate courses online, and have completed the State of Illinois Master On-Line Teaching Certificate.