

Church on the Hill  
Congregational/United Church of Christ  
Boca Raton, FL

Open and Affirming Seminar 2  
February 11, 2018

What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say  
About Homosexuality

facilitator  
Sarah Davis Hugus, M.S. Ed.

Welcome, we are so glad you are here!

At Church on the Hill, we have a tradition of welcoming everyone to our church family, just as they are.

➤ Opening Prayer

➤ Objectives of today's seminar....

- To provide education and information, and respectfully address questions about the information provided
- To provide an opportunity to build and strengthen relationships within our congregation through graceful engagement, which is a way of practicing a holy conversation
- To listen deeply to what God is saying and doing, in each of us individually and in our congregation

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- PRAYER: Gracious God, thank you for your Word. As we begin this journey into your Word more deeply as people who take your word to us seriously, grant us your Spirit's guidance that we may be strengthened in our faith, and faithfully discern your will for us in our day. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

and I give Thanks for this prayer to the Rev. Dr. William M. Lyons, St. John's United Church of Christ, Grand Rapids, MI.

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Please participate fully in this process: make time for each seminar and ask your real - maybe difficult - questions that others may need responses to as well. We are all here to safely, openly discuss these topics so we all have the information we really need before voting. This is your church, and your decision. Please, join in the conversation.

- The questions written or asked with responses from each seminar will be printed for you and added to our ONA resources table in the church Rosser Room.
  - Starts about 11:15 and ends by 12:30 - for Sunday Seminars
  - Starts about 7:00 and ends by 8:15 - for Monday Seminars
  - First 45 minutes - presenting information about today's topic
  - Final 15-20 minutes - answering your questions and discussion
  - Questions - write them down on the cards provided and place them in the baskets on your table.
  - Questions - collected and answered/discussed in today's session

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- Ground rules - to create a safe space for everyone
  - **Be respectful of one another at all times**, especially when we disagree with another's beliefs or opinions
  - **Participate**, as actively and honestly as you are able
  - **Speak in the first person**, I believe..., I am feeling..., I think..., My experience has been...
  - **Listen attentively and without interrupting** when another is speaking
  - **Cellphones off**, to avoid disruptions
  - **Try to remain for the entire session** to avoid disruptions.
- 
- Do we need any other rules for today's session?
  
  - Let's begin...

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- There are so many good videos these days! So I chose 7 to share with you which speak better about what I have learned than I can do on my own. For my study to understand Bible references that might be hurtful to the LGBT community, I watched many You Tube videos, I watched the 4 videoed Bible workshops of Pastor Bernice Powell-Jackson from Tampa UCC, read the transcript from another UCC workshop in Michigan, read the Bible verses in question, interviewed the author and read a book by a gay pastor who was once part of the ex-gay movement, explored other resources that our sub-committee received from the LGBT Open and Affirming Coalition and studied writings by Jeff Newcomb.

# My background

- I am so grateful that I was brought up without ever hearing or reading any of these questionable verses. I was raised that God is Love, and all were created in His image, and that All was created GOOD!
- Authors, including many pastors, Gay and straight, who have studied the Bible have written many books reconciling homosexuality and Christianity.

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<https://youtu.be/HpJAucyX7RE>

trailer for "the Bible tells me so documentary" 4 min.

- We will start with a video that is nearly 11 years old, but recaps troubling history in our country; it provides much food for thought. It is a trailer from the feature documentary "For the Bible Tells Me So," which won the Sundance Film Festival and other awards in 2007. It touches on many of the concerns that Dr. Bob Rogers raised in our first seminar about acceptance of everyone, despite a Sexual Orientation that might be different from the typical or mainstream. In the video, see if you recognize a former politician and daughter, among others.



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- You can watch the entire documentary “For the Bible Tells Me So” on Netflix or through the Boca Raton Library’s hoopla app.
- I found it so interesting to be able to see in depth how 5 different family units responded to the facts of having a gay son or daughter.

# UCC LGBT history

- The United Church of Christ has paved the way in many areas of extravagant welcome, by
- ordaining the first protestant gay pastor, the
- first lesbian pastor,
- declaring the denomination ONA in 1985 and encouraging local churches to do the same, and providing resources for this process for us and many churches.
- UCC believes in reading the Bible with the consideration that God is Still Speaking to us in this different time from when it was written.

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<https://youtu.be/oN318ISryAg> - UCC General Minister and President,  
Rev. John Dorhauer, post Pulse Nightclub, June 14, 2016, 3:14.

- Now we come to current times and the real impetus for our current study and journey through the Open and Affirming process within Church on the Hill. On June 12, 2016, 49 people were gunned down and murdered, and many more were injured, while they were enjoying an evening out socializing in the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando. The next day Sunday morning, Pastor Tom spoke emotionally about this event. At the next meeting, the Vision Ministry decided to pursue the ONA study with appointment of a lay sub-committee. This video from soon after reminds us of how most people felt - both angry and helpless - in the aftermath. The UCC General Minister and President, the Rev. John Dorhauer, addresses those gathered in Orlando with a huge supporting crowd of clergy with him.

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- In Florida, approximately half of our UCC churches are already Open and Affirming. Our sub-committee met with representatives from 4 ONA churches - Ft. Lauderdale UCC, Church of the Palms in Delray Beach, Lake Worth UCC, and Union Congregational in WPB. We asked for their advice about what types of education and discussion we should be sure to include. Reviewing 6 or so verses from the Bible was universally important.
- Let's first review some facts about how people read and understand the Bible.

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HOW do we read and understand the Bible?

- The Bible is a book of theology and stories to explain faith
- The Bible is not a history book, though it does have some historical facts, but it also has legends and parables that are not historically provable - it is often studied as a book of literature, since it contains many poems, prose and songs.
- The Bible is not a Science text book
- When a person reads the Bible, how they understand it is based on their life experience, their social status, sexual orientation, age, cultural background and other considerations.
- If one understands Greek, Latin, or Aramaic languages, he/she can get a very different meaning than those of us who only read American English.

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<https://youtu.be/RDN-ZbpVSP8>

Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis Ch. 19: vss. 1-11+  
Homosexuality and the Bible 2, John Corvino - June 2013, 6:21

- We will see 2 videos that interpret some of the more difficult verses. These verses have been used since the 1800's to try to make homosexual persons feel less worthy than heterosexual persons to be included in God's kingdom. The videos have similar content, but explained a bit differently.
- During the second video we will pause between sections to add a bit more context about the times that they were written. We will try to picture what those societies were like, and how the Jews were to be set apart in the ways they lived from the Greeks and ruling Roman pagan-worshipping societies.

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<https://youtu.be/lelcLYj3I3U>

## What the Bible Really Says About Being Gay

- Video from Leviticus and Genesis scriptures
  - Includes the following:
- Genesis 18:16+
- Ezekiel 16:49-50
- Leviticus 18:22
- Leviticus 20:13

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What the Bible Says and Doesn't Say about Homosexuality [https://youtu.be/  
jhclAXHz7GA](https://youtu.be/jhclAXHz7GA)

Scholars explain Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; 4:33

- show video listed above



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What the Bible Says and Doesn't Say about Homosexuality

Rev. Dr. William M. Lyons, St. John's United Church of Christ, Grand Rapids, MI  
workshop: "What the Bible Really Says About Gay Christians (may surprise you)"  
quoted from Dr. Lyons' workshop:

We have considered a number of Old Testament passages, and several passages from the New Testament - the writings from the earliest Christians that were given the same authority by the Church as the Hebrew Scriptures. When we buy a Bible or Tanakh we might think the writings in the book were always considered the Word of God. That is not the case. The Jewish canon or list of authoritative books we call the Old Testament was formulated over a 400 year period, from 200 BCE to 200 CE, by Jewish rabbis and scholars. That formulation was in process during the life of Jesus and the first two centuries of the church's life. It took between 250 and 300 years for Christians to arrive at the list of writings we call the New Testament. Even as late as the 16<sup>th</sup> century Martin Luther was challenging the validity of some of the New Testament writings as God's Word, the Book of James in particular, related to the Protestant Reformation. Jews and Christians alike believe that God was actively involved in the processes used for determining the lists of authoritative books.

- Our effort in interpreting the sacred text we summarily call the Bible stands in a long history of God's people endeavoring to hear God's voice for their lives for their day.

from Andy Lang and Rod Mundy of LGBT Coalition's The Bible and ONA webinar I learned:

In the Bible are 31,000 verses - there are 8 or fewer verses that MAY condemn same sex relations; = .02% of Bible.

Often folks have fear of people who seem different to them, or have heard prejudices about the "other." Let's get to know people as **people**, not being concerned about sexual orientation.

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- from UCC web site:
  - The Bible both unites and divides us as a church. Our spiritual ancestors have never agreed, even in the first generations of the Christian community, about the right way to read and apply scripture.
  - What about scriptural authority?
    - ▶ Scripture is often quoted by all sides in ethical conflicts that divide us.
  - Dr. Bernice Powell-Jackson of Tampa UCC suggests: What if we see the Bible as God's gift to the church, to be read for our instruction and comfort rather than as a hammer used to strike down the arguments our opponents or to exclude each other from the body of Christ?
  - to quote The Rev. John Thomas, former UCC General Minister and President: "To begin taking the Bible seriously is to approach it expectantly, to honor its transparency and to discover that it not only discloses God, the word made flesh [but] it also strips us bare before that same word to portray us in all our grandeur and all our depravity. So, in a peculiar way, the Bible is both divine revelation and human disclosure."

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### What the Bible Says and Doesn't Say about Homosexuality

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workshop: "What the Bible Really Says About Gay Christians (may surprise you)"  
quoted from Dr. Lyons' workshop:

The laws in Leviticus 19 are based on the holiness of God and are designed to help Israel reflect the nature of their God. Leviticus chapter 20 prescribes the punishments for breaking the laws in both of these chapters. God does not offer a statement condemning Israel's neighbors for doing the very things from which they are commanded to abstain; God simply says that for Israel, these things ought not to be done so that they are different from their neighbors.

Christians long ago stopped interpreting many of these regulations, often called "Holiness or Purity Codes" literally. We no longer put to death those who curse their parents or commit adultery, nor do we excommunicate those who consult horoscopes/mediums. Consistent application of these verses is important; selective enforcement has no legitimacy.

Consensual homosexual relationships do not appear to be in view. This law could legitimately be read as a prohibition of heterosexual people engaging in homosexual conduct. **However the law was read, the understanding of sexuality being an orientation was not a lens through which the ancients could consider the text.** Because the articulated purpose of the Law at the beginning of these chapters was to distinguish ancient Israel from the cultures around them, making them a set-apart people, it may very well be that no moral judgment on the sexual behaviors mentioned is intended. These laws may simply be a way to distinguish God's people from the people around them. For the Christian, the mark of our being set apart from the people around us or being holy is the Holy Spirit in our lives (Ephesians 1:13, 4:30), not the observance of laws.

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workshop: "What the Bible Really Says About Gay Christians (may surprise you)"  
quoted from Dr. Lyons' workshop:

We might ask -

- How Do We Do Our Relationships?
- How do we live in relationships: with God, with one another, with the rest of creation, and with ourselves? How we live out one relationship impacts all of our relationships. Let's explore some basic Bible information about our relationships.

- Not Good to Be Alone

- And then for the first time God said something was NOT good. "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a partner as his partner." (Genesis 2:18) For the man, the absence of being in relationship with creatures worthy of partnership was less than pleasant, advantageous, and prosperous. God included the man in the process of discerning a way to overcome that which was not good (aloneness) with something that was good (partnership). God invited Adam to name and evaluate the creatures that had been made - each as to their worthiness for partnership with him. (Genesis 2:19-20) When a suitable partner was not found for the man among the other creatures, God continued creating.

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Grand Rapids, MI workshop,  
**quotes from Dr. Lyons - continued**

How interesting to note that God couldn't complete his creating work without the input from the creature created in the divine image. There was room in all that God had done for further growth and development that included the participation of the human being. ...and to humanity (the only creature made in God's image) God also gave the responsibility of being the steward of all that God had made - caring for it and striving to bring it to its full potential. Through these creative and blessing activities, God created meaning, responsibility, and accountability through the experience of partnership, stewardship, and sexual relationships. The writer of Genesis understood these blessings and relationships to apply to all human beings (including their offspring), not just the creatures created directly by God. When God surveyed all that had happened in the six days, God pronounced all that had been made and all of the processes that had been set into motion as **good**.

- Dr Bernice (Tampa UCC workshop) adds - **There is one rule which Jesus said is above all others – the commandment to love – that is what we should follow when in doubt.**
  - That commandment to love was about being in right relationship with God and with each other.

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<https://youtu.be/4duSEXP5Q>,

Kody Hersh, Quakerspeaks, How Jesus Affirms My Queerness,  
June 2015, 4:14

- I want to wrap up with positive themes from Jesus and the Bible. I have a strong Quaker background - I attended the same Quaker college in Indiana that members Phyllis Short and Betsy Beasley attended and which is very important to Valerie Ary. Before I attended Earlham my sister graduated from and worked for Earlham, I went to meetings in Cincinnati with my convinced Quaker grandmother, my maternal great-grandfather was a birthright Quaker, and my parents became convinced Quakers about the time I began college. I have many good experiences about the Quaker-way as I know it. In my parents' meeting they welcome gay members and one member I met was becoming a male to female transgender person. In this video a gay Quaker-Christian explains how she is comforted and made to feel free and loved. Let's listen to Kody's testimony.

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[https://youtu.be/tNd\\_IdjWGgM](https://youtu.be/tNd_IdjWGgM),

**Open and Affirming churches,  
a minister's perspective, by Mia Smith, 2012, 4:22**

In conclusion, I feel Christian churches should be sharing inclusive messages of God and Jesus's love. We do not make progress by being divisive or by excluding anyone. It has not been helpful historically to distort Bible verses to promote self-serving agendas, as we saw in the hatefulness in our first video today. All are welcome at the table - which is the UCC message that means the most to me. Our last video was created from a minister's point of view, prior to the Federal legalization of gay marriage in 2016. I hope this video makes you smile!

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## What the Bible Says and Doesn't Say about Homosexuality

References used in today's seminar:

Holy Bible, NRSV

Tampa UCC - series of 4 workshops, recorded on UCC Tampa facebook page and slides by Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. Bernice Powell-Jackson, November 2017

Community UCC of Lansing, Michigan, workshop sessions ““What the Bible Really Says About Gay Christians (may surprise you)”

Rev. Dr. William M. Lyons, St. John's United Church of Christ, Grand Rapids, MI

Out of the Closet and Into the Light; Clearing Up the Myths and Giving Answers About Gays and Lesbians  
- book and personal interview

by Rev. Jerry Stephenson, Th.D., Ph.D. , 2000

Selected pamphlets designed to give LGBT community Biblical context and comfort  
by Jeffrey W. Newcomb, various dates

The Book of Joy

by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, with Douglas Abrams, 2016

article: Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality, by Walter Wink, LGBT Coalition, 11.7.1979



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## What the Bible Says and Doesn't Say about Homosexuality

### References

Videos - link in your browser, title, author, year, length:

For the Bible Tells Me So, complete documentary - Netflix or library Hoopla app, 2010, 99 min.

<https://youtu.be/HpJAucyX7RE> trailer for "the Bible tells me so documentary" 4 min.

<https://youtu.be/oN318ISryAg> - middle, UCC General Minister and President, Rev. John Dorhauer, post Pulse Nightclub, June 14, 2016, 3:14.

<https://youtu.be/RDN-ZbpVSP8> - John Corvino, Sodom and Gomorrah explained  
<https://youtu.be/lelcLYj3l3U>, What the Bible really says about being Homosexual - version 1, June 2015, 8:21

<https://youtu.be/jhclAXHz7GA>

Scholars explain Leviticus, 18:22, 20:13; May 2012, 4:33

<https://youtu.be/4duSEXPay5Q>, Kody Hersh, Quakerspeaks, How Jesus Affirms My Queerness, June 2015, 4:14

[https://youtu.be/tNd\\_IdjWGgM](https://youtu.be/tNd_IdjWGgM), Open and Affirming churches, a minister's perspective, by Mia Smith, 2012, 4:22

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Additional Recommended Resources from ONA sub-committee members:

A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society,

by Bruce Bawer, October 1, 1994

Changing Our Mind: Definitive 3rd Edition of the Landmark Call for Inclusion of LGBTQ

Christians with Response to Critics,

by David P. Gushee, 2017

Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? Revised and Updated: Positive Christian Response, Mar 24,

1994

Living in Sin: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality,

by John Shelby Spong, 1988

The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love

by John Shelby Spong, April 12, 2005

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Questions, Comments  
&  
Discussion

Church on the Hill, Boca Raton, FL

Open and Affirming Seminar 2

What the Bible Says and Doesn't Say About Homosexuality

Presented on February 11, 2018 and repeated on February 12

Questions asked during the seminar, with answers provided

Q = Question; A = Answer, there are several parts to some answers

Phrases, Scriptures in *Italics* were added or expanded upon after the seminar.

Written Questions Submitted

1. Q: In reference to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the book of Genesis - the stories of gang rape and how it was averted shows that even in the Bible, women were treated as property or chattel, to be bartered away like oxen or pigs or sheep. So sad. I don't think the Lord accepted this as normal [behavior], no matter what age it occurs in.
  - A. Thankfully we're mostly beyond that in our society today, but not in some other societies around the world. *In reference to the treatment of women, I would add that sex slave trade certainly does still exist in the U.S. and in many other countries and cultures around the world.*
  
2. Q: Does the Bible even condemn FEMALE Homosexuality? (Paul seems to poke fun at it, but never gets around to condemning it.)
  - A. *The only woman with woman reference is in Romans, but NOT talking about same sex committed relationships. Paul points out sexual and other behaviors related to pagan and idol worship, and the need to worship only God and not man-created gods. From The Letter of Paul to the Romans: (pg. 152 NRSV (Church on the Hill's Bible version) Ch. 1, verses 18-28: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; 21 for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools; 23 and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed*

*animals or reptiles.24 There God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done.”*

3. Q: How about Jesus curing the Centurion’s slave?

A. *That was one I missed, so I did more research in Matthew Ch. 8, 5: When he entered Capernaum, a centurion come to him, appealing to him 6 and saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.” 7 And he said to him, “I will come and cure him.” 8 The centurion answered, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.” 10 When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. 11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” 13 And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.” And the servant was healed in that hour.*

4. Q: What Bible verses can we use to share with others who are adamant that homosexuality is a sin and against God’s will?

A. Focus on scriptures of love. Believing in a loving God whose greatest commandments include love, how can exclusion be His way? For expanded answers, see i. through ix. below:

- i. ***Getting to know someone who is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender is the best way to realize that all people are made in God's image, and God indicated that all creation was GOOD.***
- ii. ***Matthew 7:12 "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."***
- iii. ***Romans Ch. 13, 8-10: "Owe no one anything except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."***
- iv. ***Romans Ch. 15, verse 7: "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."***
- v. ***"There are 31,000 verses in the Bible; of these perhaps 8 speak against same-sex sexual relations, which equals .02% of the Bible. Sex acts and sexual relations are not the same thing as committed, consensual loving relationships." from ONA and the Bible Webinar, LGBT Coalition.***
- vi. ***God is always with me.***
- vii. ***Love thy neighbor as God has loved you.***
- viii. ***Dr. Jerry Stephensen's book, "Out of the Closet and Into the Light" reminds that Jesus commands us to reach out to others in need. Our brothers and sisters who have been turned away from family relationships, attending certain churches, or even deserving a right-relationship with God would certainly include many people in the LGBT community, who might accept a welcoming invitation to come and be fully part of a church family.***
  1. ***Dr. Stephenson, page 37: "But the church again fails to reach out to those in need. When the church does***

*not reach out, they seem to only condemn and play God.”*

2. *...and page 55: “Nowhere does the BIBLE or JESUS CHRIST condemn or damn Gays/Lesbians (John 3:17; Matthew 10:11-15;). It is here we see God’s Mercy Forgiveness and Love, which is the Gospel Message. The hope for Gay/Lesbian Christians is in Jesus Christ and not in man. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: ‘For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, not things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate me from the Love of God, which is in CHRIST JESUS my LORD”*

Oral questions and comments from seminar on 2/12/18

5. Q: Thinking about “abomination” and what this means
  - A. All of the references in Leviticus relate to the purity code as rules for the Jews to be separate from their Pagan neighbors and the Pagan religious and idol worship practices of that era. *Abomination referred to purity codes and rituals as a means to separate the Jews from the Pagans. MANY behaviors were considered as abominations, or highly disgusting, outrageous, disgraceful, and at times punishable by death.*
6. Q: Question seeking clarification regarding the Sodom & Gomorrah story.
  - A. *We read our own personal biases into scripture. Rape of both men and women was - and in some places still today is - a method of war and humiliation and subjugation of outsiders and of defeated others. Kingdom of God as all accepted.*
7. COMMENT: There seems to be a generational connection among issues of segregation, equal rights for racial and gender issues, and currently for immigration. Regarding the topics of the purpose of sex, segregation, and civil rights, it feels like one theme is similar across all these issues. Just an observation. This [ONA] is a good process for our church to go through.
8. COMMENT: How much social justice you read into the Bible depends on how you want to read it.