BEST PRACTICES IN TRAINING CLERGY & OTHER RELIGIOUS LEADERS

A guide for use by trainers working with faith leadership around understanding sexual and gender identity in Sacred Texts

I AM
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INCLUSIVE & AFFIRMING MINISTRIES
— since 1995 —

IAM has worked closely with clergy and other religious leadership for over 35 years, introducing and providing training on issues around sexual and gender identity. We've pulled together some best practices and guidelines learned over the years that can help navigate challenging conversations and guide discussions into fruitful co-creation and colaboration.

PREPARATION TIPS

- Be prepared going into a workshop (do research on the denomination and stance on the issue, make sure the organisers have invited sincere participants who want to engage on issue).
- Provide a draft program for the organisers in order for them to be co-creators of the outline for the training.

KNOW YOUR SUBJECT CONTENT!

- Where possible always facilitate in a team of 2 – preferable diverse (LGBTI person / Heterosexual ally or man/ woman). This will assist you to deal with participants who feel threatened or who are difficult.

ENCOURAGE AUTHENTIC DIALOGUE

- Create a safe space to encourage an authentic encounter where the process can continue and deepen
- Authentic dialogue requires communication, listening, conflict management skills and safe spaces in which to take risks.
- Dialogue, as opposed to a sermon or lecture, is the preferred method of engaging with religious leaders when talking about difficult subjects like human sexuality.
- A **Relational** and **Dialogue** approach invites participants into a vulnerable journey.

ESTABLISH GROUND RULES

- To assist the group to establish trust early.
- Allow participants to develop their own rules of engagement.
- Request participants to keep an open mind.
- Ground rules help hold participants accountable for co-creating a learning space.

CREATE SAFE SPACES

- It is important to understand that the word **"space"** refers to both internal (our internal space) and external (our environment) and the interaction between both spaces.

- A safe space is where we are externally and internally protected and affirmed in order to reveal who we are and what we think and feel.

- In creating a safe space, we invite participants to share and engage in risky conversations. Make sure the group agrees on what will contribute to making a space safe.

- Watch the body language of participants. Be sensitive and do not take anything personally.

- Be aware of direct and indirect hate speech. Everyone needs to be protected.

- Be aware of your own triggers – don't give into them!

- Check in with participants who have become very emotional whether they need counselling or any other support. It is helpful to know in advance whether there are such services available.

POWER DYNAMICS

- As a facilitator you need to be aware of the power dynamics in the room and you are responsible for the safety of the space.

- Age, clerical position, education, gender, culture, economic status, race, church polity, geographic position (e.g. rural or city), language all contribute to the power that each participant and facilitator holds.

- Help participants to become aware of their own power and how this influences the group participation.

FAITH SYMBOLS

- Incorporate faith symbols to enhance the participants' experience to be able to link their sexuality and spirituality e.g. a cross or Holy Communion.

- When doing an interfaith religious leaders' training, be aware to include universal symbols e.g. symbols from nature, lighting a candle, moment of silence, etc. When opening with a prayer, that prayer might be silence.

LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

- Tapping into the vernacular/indigenous language is of paramount importance because the language used determines who holds the most power in the dialogue space.
- Keep in mind that the use of language is contextual, political and geographical in how people position and define themselves.
- It is advisable to ask participants how they understand these terms in their culture/language
- Clarifying terms is important so that all participants are on the same page.

Examples of language pitfalls

- *Homosexuality is a choice or lifestyle that can be cured.*
- *Derogatory stereotyping – e.g. gay men are feminine and lesbian women are butch.*
- *Language that perpetuates perceptions and stereotypes (it is helpful to do an exercise that highlights stereotypes).*
- *All gay men want to be women.*
- *Trans bodies are mentally-ill.*

Basic Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Terms

Sex	Refers to our sexual biological makeup, which is determined by our chromosomes (DNA), hormones and internal and external sexual organs	• **Female** – (internal) uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries and (external) vagina • **Male** – (internal) prostate, testis and (external) scrotum • **Intersex** – organs of both male and female.
Gender Identity/ Gender Expression	Refers to how a person identifies/expresses themselves e.g. their behaviour, dress, roles in the family and society.	• **Man** – Male/ Masculine • **Woman** – Female / feminine • **Gender Non-Conforming/Non-Binary** – does not conform/match any of the masculine/feminine gender norms • **Androgyny** – people with the combination of masculine and feminine characteristics. Androgyny applies to people who don't want to be seen/identified by their gender. • **Transgender** – people whose biological sexual make-up and assigned sex at birth do not match their psychological gender identity.
Sexual Orientation	Refers to a person's lasting emotional, romantic, physical or sexual feelings or attraction to others (a type of relationship).	• **Heterosexual** – attracted to the opposite sex • **Homosexual** – attracted to the same sex (Lesbian woman, Gay man) • **Bisexual** – attracted to both sexes (not usually at the same time, or as strongly to both). It depends on the individual • **Note:** there are many other orientations

USE OF SACRED TEXTS

- Equip yourself—e.g. how was the Bible written and collated; know the "terror texts" and contextual interpretation(s).
- People understand the authority of Sacred Texts differently.
- People read Sacred Texts for different reasons e.g. as a guide for decisions; spiritual nourishment etc.
- Acknowledge that there are different ways to read Sacred Texts e.g. literal and contextual interpretation.

Pitfalls when reading Sacred Texts

- Arguing about isolated verses and generalising by applying isolated verses to all situations until the end of time.
- Applying the different verses and/or rules inconsistently.
- Selecting verses that justify our opinion and ignoring others e.g. Lev 25:42 and Lev 19:20 and Luke 17:9 justifies slavery. There are no verses that say slavery is wrong.

Note it is important to deal with participants' comments/interpretation of verses that homosexuality is a sin similar to adultery immediately.

It is important to interrogate any text deeply, in the light of the literary and social context of which they were written. Ask questions like:

- What was meant at the time they were written, given the society the writer(s) lived in?
- How does the verses fit into the passages of which they are part of?
- What might this passage mean today, given what we know about the issue?

Note that eight texts in the Bible that refer to homosexual acts:

- Gen 1:27; Gen 2:24; Gen 19:1-14; 29
- Lev 18:22; Lev 20:13:
- Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10

Nowhere do theses Texts condemn loving, committed, respectful sexual relationships between adults in a faithful marriage relationship – whether homo or heterosexual.

Additional Bible resources available for download:

- IAM resources (iam.org.za/resources): *Journey with God, The Bible and Homosexuality*, and *The Bible and Homosexuality - What is the Spirit saying to the Churches?*

- UJAMAA resources http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/RESOURCES_OF_UJAMAA.aspx

- Norwegian Church Aid's Gender Toolkit [Tool 13] https://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/en/how-we-work/gender-based-violence-and-reproductive-health/gender-transformation-toolkit/

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