



Want to Be a Straight Ally? Have Faith!

*A Program Guide for PFLAG Chapters to Use
be not afraid -- help is on the way! in Their Faith Communities*

Here is a great way to lead a panel presentation with a group discussion on issues surrounding GLBT people in your faith community using Straight for Equality. Before you get started, be sure to be familiar with Straight for Equality by visiting www.straightforequality.org and reading *be not afraid – help is on the way: straight for equality in faith communities* and *the guide to being a straight ally*.

Speakers:

Your goal is to present a variety of perspectives, so putting together the right panel of speakers is important. A minimum of three speakers is suggested, and this successful mix often includes:

- A PFLAG parent with a story that illustrates their perspective on faith issues.
- A GLBT person with a coming out story that involves faith issues.
- A straight ally who believes in GLBT equality and advocates for it in their faith community. (Remember, for this program, an ally is someone without a family connection to the GLBT community.)
- A moderator – This person is essential! It should be someone who can keep the conversation moving and on track in a respectful way.

Materials:

- Copies of the *be not afraid* and *guide to being a straight ally* for all participants. You can order the guide from the PFLAG website or download a free PDF at www.straightforequality.org.
- A sign-up sheet (see p. 7). Suggest that attendees sign in, but be aware that some people may not be comfortable enough to fill out the form, so be sure to let them know that they're welcome at the workshop no matter what.
- Contact information for your chapter if attendees want to learn more.

Before you begin...

One of the most important aspects of making this a successful presentation is to have a clear goal from the outset. Obviously, goals will differ depending upon the congregation's level of acceptance for GLBT people and the amount of experience that attendees have with GLBT people or issues. Ensuring that you're clear on your end point will help you identify the most effective speakers, ask the best questions to get a conversation going, and tailor your comments to be responsive to the environment you're in.

An example of a goal might be:

- **For open and affirming communities:** “I hope to communicate to new allies the reasons why their voices are needed to help truly embody our status as an open and affirming congregation through our ministry and programming and start developing a strategy for making this happen.”
- **For “in between” communities:** “There are GLBT people in our congregation, but we’ve never talked about GLBT issues at all. I want to break the silence and get the conversation started so that we can do a better job at making GLBT people feel included and valued.”
- **For resistant communities:** “I hope that by bringing some personal stories in and appealing to people with basic ‘baby steps’ kinds of things that they can do in their comfort zone might change a few minds.”

Do you know what your goal is? Once you have it, we’re just about to get started. There’s just one last thing – getting into the Straight for Equality frame of mind.

Keep these points in mind as you do your presentation:

- There are many ways to be an ally. You do not have to be “political” or an “activist”. There is a spectrum of allies, from those who are still unsure how they feel about the subject but are willing to keep an open mind, to those who march in pride parades.
- Small, everyday changes matter. Sometimes, something as simple as stopping someone when they tell a gay joke can be just as important as making a political statement.
- Allies come in many forms. For us, an ally is someone who:
 - Is willing to learn more about GLBT people and issues
 - Is willing to face their own barriers to “coming out” as an ally
 - Is supportive of GLBT people/issues at whatever level they’re comfortable with
- **Practice!** Be sure to be familiar with the program flow and the questions you’ll use for leading the discussion. Know that the questions suggested here are just a starting point — there may be specific topics in your community that you’d like to cover, so use those questions.
- **Prepare!** Don’t forget to prep your panel speakers to ensure that they have prepared their comments and are ready to keep within the time constraints given.

Ready to get started? Keep reading to see the format that we suggest for your Straight for Equality faith event.



Need help? Look for these Straight for Equality blocks throughout the training for great training tips!

Want to Be a Straight Ally? Have Faith!

Total program running time: 90 minutes

- 1. Introduce yourself and your PFLAG chapter.** Don't forget to tell people what PFLAG is!
- 2. Let the speakers talk.** Each presenter should share a 5 to 8 minute personal story. Here's a way to prepare your comments:
 - Spend 1–2 minutes on your own or your child's coming out story. (Remember, allies have coming out stories too!)
 - Spend 1–2 minutes on coming out as a parent of a gay child and then coming to PFLAG (or if you are GLBT or an ally, how you came to PFLAG).
 - Talk about your coming out process as a parent and/or ally within your faith community/ church. What were the challenges? What did you encounter? Spend 1–2 minutes on this.
 - How did your religion influence your feelings about you and/or your child's coming out? The speaker should cover this for 1–2 minutes
 - Finally, spend 1–2 minutes on why Straight for Equality matters to you. Don't forget to end your comments with what you hope to accomplish by talking to people today. For example, "I hope that by telling my story as the mother of a lesbian who attends this church, it will help people understand that 'gay issues' are about more than just gay people, but their friends and families – and we are part of this congregation, too."
- 3. Tell the audience that today is all about Straight for Equality, a project of PFLAG, then the moderator should explain what Straight for Equality is. A few points to communicate:**
 - A project for people who do not have a gay family member or close friend, but want to help achieve equality
 - It's an opportunity for us to invite, educate and engage straight allies to be supportive of GLBT equality.
 - We invite straight allies (and potential straight allies) like you to learn more, speak up, and realize you can create change.
 - We offer resources to help you learn more about the lives of gay friends and family.
 - Tell them that you'll be handing out a handy guide to being a straight ally at the end of the presentation, and that they can learn more on the Straight for Equality website, www.straightforequality.org
- 4. Be sure to emphasize that in our everyday lives, there are many ways to be supportive. Maybe you're unsure about gay people or issues, maybe you feel that you need to know more about the subject, and maybe you support some GLBT issues and not others. That's ok! You can be an ally in a way that feels comfortable to you. You don't need to be political or an activist to be an ally. Making small everyday changes is just as important!**

Here are some specific examples:

 - Commit to learning more about the ally of faith journey. Reading *be not afraid* is a great place to start.

- Come out as an ally of faith. This is powerful, especially if you're still on your ally journey since it sends a message that this is about a thoughtful process, not an overnight transformation. It takes time, but you're willing to talk, share, and be supportive.
- Teach your children not to tell gay jokes
- When someone says something derogatory about gay people, speak up. Tell them it's not ok/appropriate to say those things.
- Speak up! Have conversations with people about GLBT people/issues. Saw the movie *Milk* recently? Talk about it! Had a good time with a gay friend the other day? Tell people about the great time you had, and don't leave out the fact that your friend is gay.
- Use inclusive language, such as "partner" or "spouse" instead of "husband" or "wife".
- Sign the Straight for Equality pledge! We can provide you with cards that have the pledge on them, as well as a sign-up sheet. Or you can sign online at www.straightforequality.org/pledge.
- Want to go further? Talk to leadership in your faith community about including gay people in church activities by specifically reaching out to them. You could even talk to your pastor/rabbi about including GLBT people in a sermon (if you're comfortable with that). Share a copy of *be not afraid* with that person!

5. Ask the group to get into a circle to start the discussion about what's been said.



Help! I can't get anyone to talk about why people should be allies.

Have people said that allies aren't important, or that they shouldn't speak up? Here are a few constructive responses that could help get the conversation moving and help people define what's in it for them to become an ally to GLBT people.

- Allies do have a huge impact on the lives of their gay friends, family and loved ones, so their voices are critical.
- Being an ally could be your opportunity to change the world.
- There is a slippery slope – if some people are discriminated against, then fairness is jeopardized for all. As Martin Luther King said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."
- Being an ally will help everyone in your congregation feel included.
- Being an ally is a great way to lift the spirits of those who often feel rejected.

Discussion Questions

The moderator should lead the discussion, but speakers should feel free to participate. Be sure that the attendees are driving the conversation. Give them enough time to respectfully talk about what's been presented, but make sure you keep the discussion on track. (Remember, if good side topics develop, those might be great ideas for future programs!)

1. Now that you've heard us talk, what do you think it means to be an ally – especially in the context of our congregation?
2. Do you think it's important to be an ally in our faith community? Why?
3. What are your barriers to "coming out" as an ally? What makes you uncomfortable? (Be sure to remind people that coming out for anyone isn't easy, but talking about some of our challenges helps the process. There's no shame in having barriers!)
4. What can you do to begin moving past those barriers?

Hopefully participants will come up with good strategies based on their own experiences. If not, the panel participants should mention what they did to be more comfortable. If you're still having trouble, here are a few good ways that you can suggest to attendees to overcome barriers:

- **Just have a conversation!** Use current news to get people talking. There are a number of news reports about how faith communities are handling GLBT issues. Use these stories as a starting point for a group discussion.
- **Ask "dumb" questions and know that it's ok to make mistakes.** Most times, if you tell people you're trying to learn how to be a better ally, they probably won't be offended. They'll just be happy you're making an effort! Remind people that it's ok to laugh at their mistakes. It helps break the tension and set everyone at ease.



Help! No one wants to admit what their barriers are!

Are people not talking? Maybe you can suggest some barriers to get the conversation moving. Here are a few common barriers people identify. Putting them out there might get people to speak up and provide some additional ideas:

- "This can be uncomfortable." Does it seem like there's a noticeable silence on this topic?
- "We don't want to divide our church by discussing controversial subjects."
- "Will people think I'm gay?"
- "I don't know enough!"
- "Am I even wanted? Will I even make a difference?"
- "I don't like to get into the traditional Biblical arguments against homosexuality."
- It is all too political: "Church is not the place to be political. I come to church to find some peace and be in communion with God."

(continued on page 6)

- **Know that there are big and small ways to be an ally.** This helps people who are worried about having to be “political” or an “activist”.

5. What can we do in our faith community to make the community more welcoming to GLBT people, their families, and friends?

Moderators, take note: Answers here will be different for every community. Some might have a lot of intolerance within the community to overcome, others might already be welcoming and looking for next steps. You’ll need to be familiar with your community and able to think on your feet, so be ready to lead!



What do I do if someone uses Biblical quotes or passages to argue against GLBT inclusion?

Often, people use quotes from the Bible that seem to say that being gay is not okay in the eyes of God, the church, or your religion. When someone does that, it’s easy to end up arguing about what the Bible says or doesn’t say. Don’t get pulled into this argument!

Remember this — inclusion is about love: extending the love of God and the religious community to everyone. Now is not the time for Bible interpretation, but a chance to have a discussion about how we can move past differences and observe the “Golden Rule” – to treat others as we would want to be treated. Use this talking point to get the conversation off of interpretation and back on track and focused on our behavior.

In Christian congregations, pointing to the ministry and teachings of Jesus raises the discussion to guiding principles and not Bible verses. Love is the imperative that Jesus taught. He ministered to the marginalized of his time – the outcasts of his society – lepers, the mentally ill, the sexually promiscuous, the tax collectors, reaching out to their humanity with compassion. He should be the role model for how we treat one another and participate in these discussions.

You’ll frequently hear, “love the sinner, hate the sin.” We should encourage people to move past this adage, and see the whole person – not one aspect of their personality. Bringing up “sin” immediately colors the conversation. (If someone says, “Don’t think of an elephant”, what’s the first thing that you think about? The same thing applies here when we lead with a conversation with sin.

6. **Close the conversation.** Don’t forget to wrap up the discussion by thanking people for participating, offering yourself as a resource if they have additional questions, inviting them to learn more about PFLAG and Straight for Equality online at www.pflag.org and www.straightforequality.org and – of course – provide them with copies of *be not afraid* and *the guide to being a straight ally* as well as a couple of Straight for Equality pledge cards.

Don’t forget to follow-up! Did the conversation give your clues about specific topics people would like to talk about? Did you meet people who want to talk more, or learn more? Are there opportunities to do a similar panel again with different attendees? Don’t let your effort be a one-time deal. Use this as the springboard for additional outreach and education opportunities.

