

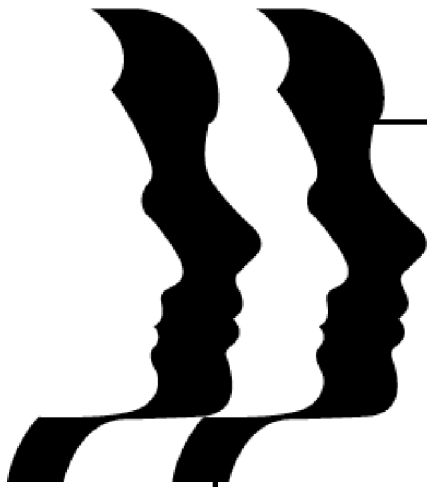
Proposition 22 and same-gender marriage

A study resource for congregations

Proposition 22 Public Education Project
A collaboration of the California Council of Churches
and the Northern California Interreligious Conference

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Table of Contents

Letter from the Executive Director.....	Page 4
Foreword.....	Page 5
Tips for discussion leaders.....	Page 6
Discussion ground rules.....	Page 7
Session I: Introduction to Proposition 22	
Session Plan.....	Page 8
Handout A—Views on marriage and family.....	Page 9
Handout B—Background.....	Page 10
Handout C—Two case studies.....	Page 14
Session II: Biblical and theological perspectives	
Session Plan.....	Page 16
Handout D—Biblical, theological and contemporary views of marriage.....	Page 18
Resources.....	Page 22
Reply Form.....	Page 23



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- United Church of Christ
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- United Methodist Church
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- Church Women United
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- Orthodox Clergy Council

Dear friends within California's religious community,

One of the most controversial issues California voters face in the March 2000 statewide primary election is Proposition 22, which seeks to define marriage. We anticipate the dialogue within the body politic on this issue will be heated on all sides. We also believe that the religious community, in all of its diversity, needs to play an active and constructive role in this statewide discussion.

The California Council of Churches has produced this study guide to help congregations understand the Initiative and to engage in dialogue. This study resource does not take a position on the Initiative, but is intended to spur individual and group reflection so that individuals in your congregation can ask the deeper questions raised by our religious traditions and can better articulate their own views on the subject.

This study can be used in a number of ways: as two one-hour adult education classes, as the program for an evening potluck supper, as a women's or men's group study resource, or as background for sermon preparation.

The person you select to lead this study in your congregation must be well trained and be a good listener, display excellent facilitation skills, and maintain absolute neutrality in the group process.

Council staff along with the staff of the Northern California Interreligious Conference will be hosting a series of facilitator training workshops around California in the coming months to equip congregational leaders to use this resource. A schedule of workshops is available through our office. We hope you will take the time to attend one of these sessions.

Sincerely,

Scott D. Anderson
Executive Director

Foreword

As we begin to discern God's calling to us around the difficult question of same-gender marriage, these words from the leaders of the United Church of Christ provide us an important starting point:

The Church in every generation has been faced with issues of great complexity and moral difficulty that have caused the household of faith to reaffirm the things that bind us together as the Body of Christ....Former generations have had to deal with such social and cultural challenges as the institution of slavery, divorce and remarriage, war and peace, the ordination of women, civil rights, and a variety of other complex issues. Our readings of scripture have resulted in sometimes confusing and occasionally even conflicting interpretations. In each of these points of tension, some of which continue in our midst, we have had to struggle together as a people of God in ways that test our resolve to remain steadfast to both biblical truth and to our faith community. Each issue has tested the Church's ability to speak boldly and to act passionately while remaining in covenant about that which we believe to be true and good. The Church has been most faithful when it has attempted prayerfully to discern the mind of Christ, engaging scripture and our traditions under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

One challenge facing the Church in our time is the issue of blessing relationships between same-gender couples and extending to them the same rights and privileges afforded to heterosexual couples. It has become a divisive issue in our culture. Scriptures are quoted by all sides in this debate, disclosing both the essential truth of the biblical insights and the limited character of our understanding of God's continuing revelation among us.

When we engage this difficult topic, we see human faces not abstract issues of sexual ethics, theology, or even matters of church order. First of all we see people; we see brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. We see the very neighbors Jesus has invited us to love. Our families often include gay men and lesbians who are baptized in Christ, members of our congregations, struggling and seeking the meaning and expression of covenantal commitment in Christian community...

Some members of the household of faith believe that same-sex couples ought to enjoy the same rights as heterosexual couples; others disagree. There are those who argue persuasively that the Gospels have nothing to say about the issue of homosexuality and therefore we should not judge. There are others who point out that Jesus holds the marriage covenant between a man and a woman as sacred. There is room here for open, honest, and loving debate in honesty of thought and expression and purity of heart before God.

—A Pastoral Letter from the Conference Ministers of the United Church of Christ, June 4, 1997

Tips for effective discussion leadership

(Courtesy of the Study Circle Resource Center, Pomfret, CT)

1. Be Prepared

The leader does not need to be an expert (or even the most knowledgeable person in the group) on the topic being discussed, but should be the best prepared for the discussion. This means understanding the goals of the adult forum (or study circle), familiarity with the subject, thinking ahead of time about the directions in which the discussion might go, and preparation of discussion questions to aid the group in considering the subject. Solid preparation will enable you to give your full attention to group dynamics and to what individuals in the group are saying.

2. Set a relaxed and open tone

- ✎ Welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.
- ✎ Well-placed humor is always welcome and helps people focus differences on ideas rather than on personalities.

3. Establish clear guidelines for discussion

At the beginning of the study circle, establish the guidelines and ask participants if they agree to them or want to add anything:

- ✎ All group members are encouraged to express and reflect on their honest opinions; all views should be respected.
- ✎ Though disagreement and conflict about ideas can be useful, disagreements should not be personalized. Put-downs, name-calling, labeling, or personal attacks will not be tolerated.
- ✎ It is important to hear from everyone. People who tend to speak a lot in groups should make special efforts to allow others the same opportunity.
- ✎ The role of the leader is to remain neutral and to guide conversation according to the ground rules.

4. Stay aware of and assist the group process

- ✎ Always use your 'third-eye'; you are not only helping to keep the group focussed on the content of the discussion, but you will be monitoring how well the participants are communicating with each other—who has spoken, who hasn't spoken, and whose points haven't yet received a fair hearing.
- ✎ Consider splitting up into smaller groups to examine a variety of viewpoints or to give people a chance to talk more easily about their personal connection to the issue.
- ✎ When wrestling with when to intervene, err on the side of nonintervention.
- ✎ Don't talk after each comment or answer every question; allow participants to respond directly to each other. The most effective leaders often say little, but are constantly thinking about how to move the group toward its goals.

- ✎ Don't be afraid of silence. It will sometimes take a while for someone to offer an answer to a question you pose.
- ✎ Don't let anyone dominate; try to involve everyone.
- ✎ Remember: a forum is not a debate but a group dialogue. If participants forget this, don't hesitate to ask the group to help reestablish the guidelines.

5. Help the group grapple with content

Make sure the group considers a wide range of views. Ask the group to think about the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of looking at an issue or solving a problem. In this way, the trade-offs involved in making tough choices become apparent.

- ✎ Ask participants to think about the concerns and values that underlie their beliefs.
- ✎ Don't allow the group to focus on or be overly influenced by one particular personal experience or anecdote.
- ✎ Either summarize the discussion occasionally or encourage group members to do so.
- ✎ Remain neutral about content and be cautious about expressing your own values.
- ✎ Help participants to identify 'common ground' but don't try to force consensus.

6. Use questions to help make the discussion more productive, such as:

- ✎ What seems to be the key point here?
- ✎ What is the crux of your disagreement?
- ✎ Does anyone want to add to (or support, or challenge) that point?
- ✎ Could you give an example or describe a personal experience to illustrate that point?
- ✎ Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?
- ✎ What experiences or beliefs might lead people of faith to support that point of view?

7. Reserve adequate time for closing the discussion

- ✎ Ask the group for last comments and thoughts about the subject.
- ✎ You may wish to ask participants to share any new ideas or thoughts they've had as a result of the discussion.
- ✎ If you will be meeting again, remind the group of the readings and subject for the next session.
- ✎ Thank everyone for their contributions.
- ✎ Provide some time for the group to evaluate the group process, either through sharing aloud or through a brief written evaluation.

Discussion ground rules

- ✍ Always share your concern and beliefs.
- ✍ Listen carefully to others.
- ✍ Be willing to examine your own beliefs in light of what others say.
- ✍ Speak your mind freely, but strive to maintain an open mind.
- ✍ Strive to understand the position of those who disagree with you.
- ✍ Cooperate with the leaders to keep the discussion on track.
- ✍ Don't monopolize the discussion.
- ✍ Address remarks to the group and not at an individual.
- ✍ Communicate your needs to the leaders.
- ✍ Value your own experience and opinions.
- ✍ Engage in friendly disagreement: avoid emotional argumentation, yelling, and personal put-downs.
- ✍ Remember that humor and a pleasant manner can go far in helping you make your points.

Session I: Background on Proposition 22 and same-sex marriage

Session Plan

By the end of this session, participants will:

- Be introduced to Proposition 22
- Understand some of the issues surrounding same-gender marriage
- Hear from supporters and opponents of the Initiative
- Reflect on the meaning of marriage
- Begin to raise questions in their own minds about the issues raised by the Initiative

Gathering and introductions 5 minutes

Set up the seating in a circle. Welcome the participants. Open with prayer. Invite each person to introduce him/herself by name. Distribute the study material (pages 10-13) if these are not already in hand.

Purpose of the study 5 minutes

- Post in the room a copy of the reason for the study (page 10). Go over the list with the participants.
- Read aloud the Foreword (page 5).
- Post in the room the discussion ground rules (page 7). Ask everyone to read through the ground rules in unison.

Focus on marriage 5 minutes

Invite each participant to think for a moment about a marriage that is important to him/her. Invite the group to briefly name the qualities of a good marriage. Remind the group that we are not simply talking about an issue but about *people* and the most important relationships of their lives.

Viewpoints on marriage and family 10 minutes

To begin the dialogue, provide each participant with the Viewpoints questionnaire (Handout A on page 9). Ask the participants to break into diads (pairs) to share their responses to the Viewpoints. Instruct the participants to *Answer the questions according to your belief or understanding at this particular time.*

Explanation of Proposition 22 25 minutes

Divide the group in half. Ask everyone to review the material about the Initiative in Handout B on page 10. One group will list, "Proponents of Proposition 22 believe...." and the other group will list, "Opponents of Proposition 22 believe...." Ask each group to share their lists. Remind participants that the exercise is to be a report rather than a debate about the issues. Use "Tips for Discussion Leaders" (page 6) as a guide for a full discussion of the various positions.

Assignments 5 minutes

Assign each person one of the two case studies on pages 14 and 15. Invite them to read the study material before the next session.

Closing circle responses 5 minutes

Invite each person to complete the sentence: "A new insight I have received today is...." Invite the group to respond with "thank-you" or "Amen." Close with a simple prayer of thanksgiving for the gathering and the persons present.

Handout A—Session I

Views on marriage and family

Do you agree or disagree with the following comments. State your opinion at this time. Indicate by numbering as follows:

1—Agree fully 2—Agree partially 3—Disagree partially 4—Disagree fully

1. Marriage is a religious ceremony, which signifies God's blessing of the relationship and the commitment of the couple to live in covenant with God._____
2. Marriage can only be defined as a relationship between a man and a woman._____
3. Children need stability, and this can only occur in a home where there is a mother and a father._____
4. Marriage is a legal matter, and is undertaken for the protection of the individual and of society._____
5. Any marriage recognized in one state should be recognized in another._____
6. Marriage is basically for the intent of procreation._____
7. Children need stability, and thus it is important that their parents (gay or straight) receive the same legal protection._____
8. Marriage is an oppressive system stemming from another time and place. Why expect the government to affirm or deny any of our relationships, heterosexual or homosexual?_____
9. Homosexual persons can have committed relationships if they want, but there is no need for any legal and/or religious recognition._____
10. The Bible provides important guidelines for both heterosexual and homosexual couples._____

Handout B—Session I

Background on Proposition 22

Part I: Introduction

A. Marriage, family and sexuality

- What is a family?
- What is marriage?
- Who defines these basic human relationships?

Family, marriage, children, commitment—many would see these aspects of life as personal and intimate dimensions of human relationships, part of the private sector of society. But the topic of marriage and family has entered into the public and political realm in heated and opinionated discussions during recent years. The phrase “family values” has become a political code word.

We know that every society and culture creates guidelines, rules and expectations which address human relationships. Cultural rules addressing relationships are rarely static. In the 20th century, especially in the Western world, the rules for social behavior have undergone significant change. Changes have sought to address a more just and equitable treatment of persons in all segments of society: the rights of children, such as in labor and education laws; the changing roles of women, from voting rights to equal access in employment and legal status; the civil rights of all racial and ethnic communities; the changes in employment practices forbidding discrimination of persons with handicapping conditions—all of these have been part of a changing social system, which impact the most basic of human relationships.

What is the role of the religious community in relationship to cultural changes? Does the religious community call for change, resist change, help change happen, provide theological reflection for managing the change or do all of these simultaneously? How one answers these questions has an impact on how one responds to particular issues.

The particular issue of this study is marriage, and its meaning particularly to the committed relationships of the gay/lesbian community. Religious communities, with different perspectives on cultural change, based on history, theology, culture and practice, have responded in different ways as society addresses same-gender marriages. Some religious communities find a significant threat to faith and world-view in same-gender marriage and are actively involved in critique and resistance on moral and theological grounds. Other religious communities have said little publicly about homosexual persons. Some religious communities are now actively seeking change based on their theological view of justice and compassion, which, just like their counterparts on the other side, stems from their scriptural understandings.

B. Reason for the study

The California Council of Churches has prepared this study out of a commitment to help the religious community engage in a constructive exploration of same-sex marriage. The study resource endeavors to:

- enable conversation and dialogue among diverse persons about same-gender marriage;
- diffuse an emotionally charged issue;
- provide a variety of perspectives from different religious and civic communities;
- clarify the issues involved in the current ballot initiative;
- explore some theological approaches to same-gender relationships and marriages;
- provide personal stories for reflection.

A. What is Proposition 22?

Proposition 22 originally sponsored by Senator William J. "Pete" Knight (R-Palmdale, California) will be on the California ballot on March 7, 2000. The 14-word initiative says: *Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.*

In 1996 the federal government passed into law a bill called "The Defense of Marriage Act" (DOMA). It moved swiftly through both House and Senate, and was signed immediately by President Clinton. This was the first time in U.S. history that the federal government became involved in marriage law. Limits and guidelines on marriage have always been part of states rights. DOMA is formulated to give states the power to deny recognition of same-gender marriages performed in other states.

Currently California, and all other states, recognize legal marriages from any state in the union. There is currently no state that legally recognizes marriage between persons of the same gender. There are active movements in a number of states, both in the courts and in the State legislatures, especially in Hawaii and Vermont, seeking legal recognition of same-gender marriage.

The issue behind Proposition 22 addresses whether California will recognize a marriage between persons of the same gender, if such marriages become legal in another state. In addition, the initiative, if passed, would prevent California from enacting any future legislation recognizing same-gender unions, without undergoing another initiative process.

B. Why is Proposition 22 on the ballot and what is its importance?

The supporters of the initiative include the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, the Assemblies of God, along with The Capitol Resource Institute, a Sacramento-based nonprofit, nonpartisan family issues policy center.

The Capitol Resource Institute organized one of the first Internet signature campaigns in order to qualify the initiative for the March 2000 ballot. Qualifying for the ballot in California usually requires the hiring of signature gatherers which typically costs around \$1 million. Two previous attempts failed to qualify for the ballot.

The March 2000 ballot is significant because it is the presidential primary ballot. For some of the supporters of Proposition 22, this provides a significant opportunity for exposure to their concern about same-gender marriage. Because the issue of same-gender marriage is politically controversial, the supporters feel the pairing of the Initiative with the election will help voters identify candidates who reflect the concerns of Proposition 22. It will therefore provide a very visible litmus test for the elections, and will become one of the issues by which candidates are evaluated for their views.

C. What is the purpose of Proposition 22?

Supporters believe that:

- Marriage is not a right, but a description of a particular system of relationship that is by definition limited to a man and a woman. Therefore, gay/lesbian persons who seek recognition of their relationships cannot participate, and are not excluded as a minority, simply because they do not fit the terms of the law.
- The Initiative, if passed into law, is a protective measure, which will clarify the situation regarding same-gender marriage, and make sure it will not be legalized.
- Many other states have already passed similar initiatives, and therefore support the constitutionality of the law.
- The concern raised by some regarding potential court costs which address the Initiative's constitutionality is conjecture.
- The gay/lesbian community and their supporters seem to be blaming hate crimes on law abiding citizens, which is not true.
- Religious people must stand for moral good and find politicians who will be courageous enough to speak out.
- Allowing same-gender marriage opens the door to giving even more rights to the gay/lesbian community in civil society.

Opponents believe that:

- The Initiative is unneeded, unfair, unconstitutional and costly.
- The initiative seeks to protect against something that does not exist at this point in time—legally sanctioned same-gender marriage. A yes or a no vote in no way impacts the legality of same-gender marriage in California.
- It is questionable whether it is constitutional to pass a law which might stand in conflict with other states' public acts, records, and judicial proceedings. Historically and constitutionally, marriages and other such public proceedings are recognized across state lines, as was proven in the unraveling of laws preventing inter-racial marriage.
- This Initiative contributes to the creation of a climate of oppression, which for a few encourages the commitment of hate crimes.
- There is a concern about the separation between church and state when such initiatives are passed.
- A minority should not be denied legal protection and benefits on the basis of the religious beliefs of the majority.
- This Initiative reaffirms a myth that gays and lesbians are "non-moral" people.
- Religious people must stand for justice and seek equality in society.

Part III: Exploring our questions/answers about same-gender marriage

A. Why are people seeking same gender marriages? What are their concerns?

Persons supporting same-gender marriage are concerned that gay/lesbian persons should have the right to make their relationship public and legal, just as other persons are free to do.

Gay/Lesbian persons have long been in committed relationships with no legal protection, they have encountered many problems because they lacked legal status in their relationships. Issues of property ownership, provision of health care, guardianship of children, and other rights of the family have been withheld for same-gender couples.

B. How do persons opposed to the idea of same-gender marriages respond to these concerns?

Those in opposition to same-gender marriage maintain the position that marriage is not a right but a privilege, and that persons of the same gender have the same opportunities for legal rights that other unmarried persons have who share a household. Marriage is an institution organized for the good of society, for the care of children, and these are understood to occur only within the parameters of marriage between one woman and one man.

C. Is marriage a fundamental right?

The United States Supreme Court has held consistently that marriage is a fundamental right. Some would argue that this fundamental right to marry has been understood to be between a man and a woman, and thus would not be valid for same-sex marriages.

Marriage is a basic human right. You cannot tell people they cannot fall in love. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. used to say when people talked about interracial marriage, and I quote, "Races do not fall in love and get married. Individuals fall in love and get married."

—Testimony of Rep. John Lewis of Georgia before Congress on the Defense of Marriage Act, 7/1/96

Many supporters of Proposition 22 view homosexual behavior as sinful, based upon their biblical understanding. They believe that God's purpose for human society is only heterosexual and the biblical texts in Genesis 1 referring to the creation of men and women provide a biblical understanding of marriage, which must be upheld by civil society.

D. Is marriage a religious or civil institution?

The word *marriage* is basically a legal term for a relationship recognized in civil society. Wedding ceremonies can be performed by either designated civil servants or by religious clergy, but both are performed as

representatives of the civil society. A marriage license is issued by and filed with county authorities. The content of the ceremony itself is of no consequence to the government; licensing, registration and regulation are their function.

The term "marriage" is also used by religious communities and institutions. Each religious community has its own requirements, procedures and rituals. Some faith communities recognize and perform same-gender marriages, yet these receive no legal recognition at the present time.

E. Is the discussion about same-gender marriage a religious issue or civil issue?

Many of the arguments for support of Proposition 22 are based on religious concerns. To date, two of the largest funders for the Initiative are the Christian ministry called "Focus on the Family" and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

In a press release on June 18, 1999, the California Catholic Conference of Bishops stated, "We invite our Catholic people as well as the people of California to recommit ourselves to uphold the dignity of every person, to acknowledge individual rights and responsibilities, and to support forthrightly the unique and irreplaceable role of marriage as an institution which is fundamental to society. Consequently, we urge the passage of the Protection of Marriage Act [Proposition 22]."

Persons opposed to the Initiative point out that in a secular government, which the Constitution calls for, a minority should not be denied legal protection and benefits on the basis of the religious beliefs of the majority.

A Marriage Resolution: Because marriage is a basic human right and an individual personal choice, RESOLVED, the State should not interfere with same-gender couples who choose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitment of civil marriage.

—by the National Freedom to Marry Coalition (supporters include Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, ACLU, PFLAG, National Organization for Women, Log Cabin Republicans, Union of American Hebrew Congregations Reform Judaism, People for the American Way).

Religious concerns also are expressed by opponents who affirm the diversity of God's creation and the sacredness of each individual.

F. Is there any comparison to be made between same-gender marriages and civil rights racial issues in marriage?

The laws governing civil marriage have evolved over the years. Increasingly, an individual has had the right to decide who to marry, regardless of race, class, religion, age (with limits), and citizenship.

It has only been 32 years since the prohibition of marriage between different races was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court responded to the laws of sixteen states which were similar to those of Virginia: *all marriages between a white person and a colored person shall be absolutely void without any decree of divorce or other legal process.* —Va. Code Ann. S 20-57

Opponents of Proposition 22 find striking similarities between the laws against inter-racial marriage and the actions against same-gender marriage. For instance, in South Dakota, the law, which prohibits marriages between the same gender is remarkably similar to that of Virginia's law against inter-racial marriage.

Many supporters of Proposition 22 understand the comparison with racial issues as irrelevant and do not view same-gender marriage as one of civil rights. They point out that race is an inherited characteristic which is not changeable. On the other hand, they believe homosexuality is a behavior to be overcome and changed.

Handout C—Session I

Case Study 1

Read through your case study. It is a story rooted in real experience. Ask yourself: What are the issues in the story as it is presented? What questions does the story raise for me? What does the case tell me about marriage? What decision do I find myself coming to as a result of each story? How will Proposition 22 affect these persons?

Joyce and Brenda have been friends for 15 years. After Joyce's partner, Maria, died of cancer, the two of them became closer and realized they had an important relationship to which they wanted to commit themselves. They became a family. Maria was mother to a young girl named Lily. Lily's father had become involved with drugs, and became unable to take care of his daughter. Joyce had been very present in Lily's life, and had been able to adopt her right before her mother died when Lily was 3 years old.

Joyce is a professional architect, with a good salary. Brenda is a writer, and the more outgoing of the two women. When Lily began attending the local elementary school, they both were involved, but Brenda became the parent on the scene. She is the one who arranges play dates, walks Lily to school and is active with the PTA. Brenda wants to adopt Lily. She adores her. Joyce and Lily want this badly. They have already spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on lawyers, CPAs, financial planners, financial advisors, investment advisors, etc. in order to protect their family's future. They have no inheritance rights, no social security benefit rights, no authority to make health care decisions for each other, no right to their partner's IRA, 401K or ESOP plans, no right to their partners health benefits, the house doesn't automatically go to the other upon the death of one. They cannot even legally have a joint checking account because as an unemployed stay-at-home mom, the IRS would consider everything one partner would put into such a checking account a gift to the other.

Adoption depends upon the attitude of the judge assigned to their case. As is usual for gay second parent adoptions, according to state Department of Social Services policy, Brenda's request to adopt was turned down, and then assigned to a judge. Court fees and attorney fees have to be paid. Because Brenda works at home as a writer, she had to list herself as unemployed. It is not possible to list joint household income, even though Joyce's salary is more than enough for their household, and Brenda's work at home provides a stable environment for Lily. During a home visit by a DPSS Social Worker, the fact that Brenda has been her parent for most of Lily's life is ignored. Instead, questions focus around Brenda's plans to tell Lily that she is adopted, and how important this is for her "identity." It was not known by the Social Worker that Joyce's family has a history of chronic heart disease, and so it is critical for Lily that Brenda adopts her.

Handout C—Session I

Case Study 2

Read through your case study. It is a story rooted in real experience. Ask yourself: What are the issues in the story as it is presented? What questions does the story raise for me? What does the case tell me about marriage? What decision do I find myself coming to as a result of each story? How will Proposition 22 affect these persons?

Joe was a Boy Scout leader, a much-loved leader of the church, and well known in the community. He had devoted 17 years to scouting, even after their son had gone on to college. One day his wife showed him a newspaper article about the courts trying to force a Boy Scout troop to accept a Scout leader that was homosexual. Joe was furious. What business did the courts have forcing someone like that into the good, wholesome setting of the Scouts? Scouting is where boys are taught to be men, and there wasn't anything very manly about these "gay guys" as he liked to refer to them. It was pretty strange that the guy had made it to Eagle Scout.

The next Sunday was Scout Sunday and Joe had been asked to preach. He preached on a text from Romans, where Paul admonishes the church about uncontrolled sexuality, and says that it was an abomination for a man to lay with another man. He preached "we have to teach the kids that God created us to be male and female, and to deny this is to go against God, and God's whole plan for the human family. Family is the key word," he said in his sermon. He urged each of the boys to grow up and find a woman to share life with, to have children, and to teach their children right from wrong. "Homosexuality is like creating an idol, it is loving ourselves instead of loving God. Maybe people can't help the way they are, but they sure can do something about how they act."

During the week he got telephone calls from a number of church members. Most of them were supportive and thanked him. But one was from a man who had been a friend for years, who asked, "Isn't there enough love in God to go around to everybody, including the homosexuals? Wasn't Paul really most concerned about caring relationships?"

Another call was from his son's best friend from junior high who was now a College senior. He didn't say much, just "Mr. Joe, I heard about your sermon. I was always glad you were my scout leader. I guess I just want you to know, Mr. Joe. I'm gay." And he hung up the phone. Joe was startled. He didn't know what to think. He went on the Internet and found a site called Family Research Council, in Washington, D.C. Joe was grateful for the information they provided him which reaffirmed that the Bible teaches that homosexuality is a sin, and that we can love the sinner but hate the sin.

Session II: Biblical and theological reflections on same-gender marriage

Session Plan

By the end of this session, participants will:

- Consider how our religious traditions view marriage
- Look at a variety of Biblical texts concerning marriage
- Reflect on the meaning of marriage
- Consider the variety of ways the Knight Initiative might be viewed through the eyes of faith

Gathering 5 minutes

Invite persons to be seated in a circle. Open with prayer. Introduce newcomers. Distribute Handout D, page 18.

Marriage as covenant 5 minutes

The leader should give a short review of Part I of Handout D that discusses how our religious traditions view marriage as a covenant.

Changes in marriage 10 minutes

Ask the group: what changes in the understanding of marriage have taken place during your lifetime? Invite people to call these out; arrange for two people to list these on newsprint for the group. Have the group brainstorm changes in marriage laws, marriage ceremonies, marriage agreements, and marriage practices. Ask the question: In what way, if any, do these changing understandings affect how we, as religious people, approach the subject of same-gender marriage?

Biblical study 30 minutes

(Optional: ask your pastor to give a brief 10 minute overview of the three texts outlined in Handout D before splitting into small groups). Divide into 3 groups. Assign a Biblical text from the study to each. Ask them to review the material in the study guide, and then respond to the following questions:

- What does this text tell me about relationships from a faith perspective?
- What questions does this text raise for me?
- In what way does this text speak to the concerns of the proponents and opponents of Proposition 22?

Group reflection on bible study 10 minutes

Ask each group to report back briefly their learnings from the Bible study.

Case study (Exercise D) 15 minutes

The groups are to read about and seek to understand the person/couple of the case study. Following are some questions to explore:

- What are the issues in the story?
- What questions does the story raise for me?

- What do the cases tell me about marriage?
- How would Proposition 22 affect these persons?

Bring the group back together. What observations do they bring?

Next steps

10 minutes

Review through the steps in Section IV of Handout D: "What's Next?" In closing, ask each person to name one next step in their own life which emerged from the study. Explore as a group what the next step on this issue might be for the congregation as a whole.

Closing ritual

5 minutes

Stand, hold hands. Beginning with one person, ask her/him to say their name, and have the group respond: "We give thanks for you, _____, Child of God!"

Handout D—Session II

Biblical, theological and contemporary views of marriage

Part I: What is marriage?

Introduction

For the religious community, particularly within the Abrahamic tradition (Judeo-Christian and Islamic communities), marriage is associated with covenant with God, as well as commitment in the presence of God. It is a part of God's plan and a sharing in God's creation. Within some faith communities marriage is the fulfillment of God's law; sharing in creation is symbolized in procreation. "Be fruitful and multiply," the admonition of the Creation story, becomes a directive, so that marriage and the procreation of children become inseparable. For other faith communities, the theological focus is on human relationship, and on nurturing a quality and depth which mirrors the relationship that the Creator has with humanity. In the Christian community as a whole marriage is considered a covenant with God; in the Roman Catholic tradition it is a sacrament.

When we turn to the scriptures for guidelines on marriage and relationships, we find that much of the biblical narrative describes a cultural setting very different from the contemporary western world. Men have multiple wives and concubines, women have little choice in marriage, and their worth is that of child bearer and property. Widowed women are powerless and often economically destitute; Jesus condemns divorce as adultery. How then do these views of marriage impact our understanding of contemporary marriage for faithful people? How do we respond to the integrity of our religious traditions while viewing them in their historical and cultural contexts? How is the Spirit calling us to respond?

Part II: Biblical guidelines on sexual behavior and marriage

The need for careful biblical study

The biblical accounts about relationships, marriage and sexual behavior are complex and reflect the practices of many generations and cultures of people. It is important in exploring biblical texts to seek the theological truth in the midst of its cultural embodiment. This can be accomplished by:

- studying to understand the cultural context of a particular biblical account;
- using research materials which explore the original language (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) and seeking accurate translations of these words;
- comparing several different translations of the Bible to note different translations of words;
- using reason to understand the intent of the passage, and its relationship to contemporary life.

All translations are filtered through linguistic and cultural perspectives, which impact the texts and their meanings. On a subject such as homosexuality and same-gender marriage, it is very important to take part in careful study and exploration to fully understand the viewpoint of scripture.

Biblical overview

Some exploration of biblical texts will be helpful in the dialogue about same-gender marriage. As the texts are studied, it is important to ask:

- What did this mean in the context in which it was written?
- What does it mean today?
- Are there other texts which support or conflict with this text?
- How does what I've learned correspond to my experience and knowledge?

There are few texts that actually address marriage, and even fewer that address same-gender relationships. Most of the texts are understood in diverse ways, depending on one's theological perspective. In this study we will explore three biblical references.

Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2:18-22

In these early texts, the stories of Creation are told. We hear in Genesis 2 that God creates a "helper" for Adam, whose name is called Eve; other English translations are "companion," "helpmate," or "partner." This new creature was taken from the side rib of Adam. The Genesis 1 account presents another story of creation, in which both the male and female were created at the same time, in the image of God. Some varied understandings of these creation texts are:

- God created Eve to be Adam's wife. Women are to be the companion of the male.
- God's intention is to pair persons in heterosexual relationships.
- God's intention is to create committed relationships and mutual responsibility.
- Companionship is the issue in this text, not the maleness/femaleness of the relationship.
- Sexuality is a gift from God.
- Human beings are diverse from the beginning of creation, as is God who creates humanity.
- From the beginning of creation, Eve is equal with Adam.

Genesis 19

This story is one of Lot, his wife and daughters, in the Canaanite City of Sodom. The story tells of two angels who enter into Lot's house to bring word of God's displeasure with the wickedness of the city's residents. God had decided to destroy the City of Sodom as well as the City of Gomorrah. A crowd of men gathers around the house demanding to see the angels; Lot refuses in order to protect his guests. He even offers up his daughters to the crowd instead. The family flees, and when Lot's wife looks back, she turns into a pillar of salt. The story has been the basis for the use of the word "sodomite" for homosexuals, but many biblical scholars understand this designation and interpretation of the story to be incomplete; the word itself stems from the interpretation of an 11th century theologian.

The story can be interpreted differently, depending upon one's theological point of view and method of Biblical interpretation:

- Genesis 19 is a folk story, with a sexist twist, in which Lot is so anxious to protect his guests that he is willing to offer up his daughters for rape to protect them.
- This is a tale of hospitality gone astray.
- This is a story in which the crowds that are demanding to "know the angels" are seen by some commentators as implying sexual activity, especially homosexual.
- Others assert that the homosexual reference is not accurate, because the phrase "to know" has a sexual meaning only 12 times in the Hebrew scriptures, all referring to heterosexual relations.
- There is a possibility that this text may refer to incest.
- The crowds may have demanded to see the angels because they distrusted the strangers, perhaps because they were spies.

Many contemporary Biblical scholars believe Genesis 19 refers to lack of charity and ill treatment of strangers. In the Talmud and "the Ethics of the Fathers" stories, Sodom is mentioned in the context of lack of charity, a solemn religious duty:

- Ezekiel 16:49-50 names the sin of Sodom as arrogance, overfed, unconcerned, not helping the poor and needy, haughty and the doing of detestable things. Sexual activity is never mentioned.
- Matthew 10:14-15 Jesus implies that the sin of the people of Sodom was inhospitality.

Ruth 1:1-18

The story of Ruth is one of commitment between two women, as they seek to live faithfully in response to God. The most famous text from the story of Ruth is that of Ruth's pledge to her mother-in-law Naomi:

Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried; May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you.

This text is often used at Christian weddings as part of the covenant of the couple with each other before God. We should also consider:

- Ruth was released by the Law from following Naomi, because her husband had died. The daughter-in-law Orpah was also released to return home. Ruth refused.
- Ruth's pledge is a commitment and covenant which is given by one woman to another, binding her life with hers.
- What does it mean that two women have made a covenant with each other and with God? A covenant between two individuals occurs in the Biblical context outside of traditional marriage and is blessed by God.

Other Biblical texts in the Christian tradition

When one is reviewing the Biblical information regarding marriage and relationships, it is critical to include a variety of texts. Some would want to include those texts that speak in legal terms about marriage and relationships. These would include

- admonitions of Paul concerning marriage in Ephesians 5:21-25 and Colossians 3:18-19;
- the reassertion of Jewish law by Jesus in Mark 10:5-12.

Others from different theological positions would want to include alongside those texts the ethical teachings of love and care for neighbor, and the fundamentals of relationship such as

- Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37).
- Clothe yourselves with love (Colossians 3:14).
- Faith, hope, love abide ...but the greatest of these is love (I Corinthians 13:13).

Part III: Some historical and social perspectives

The historical-social context of marriage

In her book, *What Is Marriage For?*, E.J. Graff describes the historical, economic, social and political conditions which have defined marriage through centuries of practice. She concludes with the question: "What is marriage for, in other words—like most serious political or social questions—is a question about what it means to be fully human."

Graff points out that marriage has been under constant change through all human history, and remains one of the hardest and most enduring of human institutions. She describes how marriage has historically changed in response to the needs of the community. Graff charts the change from choosing a working partner to the contemporary companion for sharing life, from production of children to happiness and intimacy, from the family as primary work group to a nurturing nest for the young, from the establishment of kinship relationships to the focus on individual spiritual needs. Many of these different understandings of marriage are reflected in different cultures and communities not only historically, but also in contemporary worldwide cultures and Christian communities.

Each individual's journey through life is unique. Some will make this journey alone, others in loving relationships - maybe in marriage or other forms of commitment. We need to ponder our own choices and try to understand the choices of others. Love has many shapes and colors and is not finite. It can not be measured or defined in terms of sexual orientation.

—Quaker Meeting, New Zealand, Statement of Affirmation and Reconciliation

Robert H. Knight, director of the Family Research Council, provides another perspective. In the Council's

"Answers to Questions about the Defense of Marriage" he says:

Marriage has been the foundation of civilization for thousands of years in cultures around the world. It is the single most important social institution, and it is the basis for the procreation of children and the heart of family life. Those who are trying to radically redefine it for their own purposes are the ones who are trying to impose their values on the rest of the population. Ordinary people did not pick this fight. They are not the aggressors. They are merely defending the basic morality that has sustained the culture for everyone against a radical attack..

In a Report of the Second Consultation of Episcopalians on Same-Sex Unions in July of 1996, the Consultation reviewed theological and pastoral considerations. Rather than attempting agreement on the situation, a system for understanding and asking questions was developed. Theologically, the practice of same-gender unions was compared to other covenant relationships in the history of the church. Then the questions were asked:

- What is being, and/or should be, sacramentally recognized, celebrated, and blessed in and by the Church?
- What counts as blessable? Does anything distinguish the blessing of a relationship between two persons from the blessing of fonts or fleets or frontals, churches, chasubles, individuals or congregations?
- What makes a relationship covenantal or contractual? Is it the content of promises? It is the kind of community to which two persons hold themselves responsible for fulfilling their promises?

Within the religious spectrum, there are those who believe the Bible sets clear and absolute rules for sexuality, i.e. chastity in singleness, fidelity in heterosexual marriage. There are others who come to their sexual and relational decisions out of a more fluid interplay between individual conscience, their family's values, and the visions received from their faith community, who weigh not only what the Bible says but also principles such as mutual trust and responsibility, honesty, justice and health, age-level appropriateness, cultural differences and recent insights from science and psychology.

—From a sermon by Rev. Barbara Gerlach, *Fidelity and Integrity: A Matter of Trust and Truth*, in the UCC educational/advocacy resource, *Equal Marital Rights for Same Gender Couples*

Part IV: What's next? Response, action and further study

In what ways can and should the religious community respond to Proposition 22?

1. First, study and become informed. These are critical steps in engaging any public issue. Responding from fears, rumors, stereotypes and anger is contrary to a Biblical model of justice, compassion and peacemaking. Continue to look for learned and thorough information.
2. Respond individually as your conscience and your prayers direct you. Do so with compassion. Speak to others about what you believe and what you think, and how you plan to vote.
3. Have there been recent hate crimes in your community? Has there been anger expressed towards persons because of their race, sexuality, or creed that you have been aware of? Check with your local police department. Tell them your church wants to do something to prevent any hate crimes in your community. Organize with other faith groups to be a united front against hate and violence. This will bring together many groups of different theological viewpoints, which can unite on the one witness of respecting human beings and ending hate.
4. Become familiar with the response of your denomination or religious community to same-gender marriage. Learn how your faith community distinguishes between the legal and religious authority regarding marriages.
5. Set up a library of materials for your church/community members to review. Send for materials from a variety of organizations, including those mentioned in the study.
6. At the close of the study, see if there are others who would like to work on a statement for your own church regarding same-gender marriages that would reflect your variety of opinions, as well as your pastoral concern.

Resources

Publications

Homosexuality and the Episcopal Church: A Structured Dialogue for Parishes and Other Communities. A Resource Book. Contact the Episcopal church for more information.

E.J. Graff, *What is Marriage For?*, Beacon Press: Boston, 1999.

Equal Marital Rights for Same Gender Couples, educational/advocacy resource of the UCC Office for Church and Society; United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, 700 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115-1100, (216) 736-3270; <http://abacus.ox.y.edu/marriage>.

William Eskridge, *The Case for Same-Sex Marriage*, New York: The Free Press, 1996.

In Defense of Marriage: Why Same-Sex Unions Miss the Mark, a report of the Family Research Council, drawn from the FRC briefing on Capitol Hill. (FRC address below)

The Bible and Homosexuality: Confronting the Challenge to Scriptural Authority, a publication by the Family Research Council. (FRC address below)

Organizations

California Protection of Marriage Initiative
www.doma.org

Californians for Fairness
www.noonknight.org

Capital Resource Institute
1414 K Steet, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 498-1940
capitolres@aol.com

A nonpartisan/nonprofit organization that fights for the rights of families of California, dedicated to the principles of traditional families, parental rights, limited government and citizen responsibility.

Equal Partners in Faith
2026 P Street NW
Washington, DC
(202) 296-4672 ex. 14
www.us.net/epf/epfNatIOfc@aol.com

A multi-racial network of religious leaders and people of faith committed to equality and diversity.

Family Research Council
801 G Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20001
(202) 393-2100
www.frc.org

The Family Research Council is a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational organization (501C-3), a part of Focus on the Family from 1988-1992. It exists to reaffirm and promote nationally, and particularly in Washington, DC, the traditional family unit and the Judeo-Christian value system upon which it is built.

Focus on the Family
Colorado Springs, CO 80995
1-800-A-FAMILY
www.family.org

An international organization, founded by Dr. John Dobson, exploring family issues. The mission is "to cooperate with the Holy spirit in disseminating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to as many people as possible, and specifically, to accomplish that objective by helping to preserve traditional values and the institution of the family.

GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation)
A national organization that promotes fair, accurate, and inclusive representation of individuals and events in all media as a means of combating homophobia and all forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation or identity.
www.glaad.org

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund
Western Regional Office
6030 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 200
Los Angeles, CA 90036
(323)937-2728
www.lambdalegal.org

A national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, and people with HIV/AIDS through litigation, education and public policy work.

NGLTF (The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force)
2320 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20009
(202)332-6483
www.nglhf.org

A progressive civil rights organization that has supported grassroots organizing and advocacy since 1973. The NGLTF helps to strengthen the gay and lesbian movement at the state and local level, serves as the national resource center for organizations dealing with anti-gay violence, radical-right legislative and ballot measures, job discrimination, health care.

National Freedom to Marry Coalition
www.freedomtomarry.org

National Religious Leadership Roundtable
A coalition of religious (Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and Protestant) organizations that support the fundamental religious principles of love and justice. (Information is available through National Gay and Lesbian Task Force)

PFLAG (Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)
A national organization promoting the health and well being of gay, lesbian and bi-sexual persons and their families.
www.pflag.com

People for the American Way
2000 M Street NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 467-4999
www.pfaw.org

Reply Form

Proposition 22—a study resource for congregations

Instructions: Please complete this reply form after you have completed the study resource guide.

Name

Your address

City/State/Zip

Name of Congregation

I am a Facilitator/leader Class participant

Please tell us what you think:

1. What did you find helpful about this study experience?

2. What could be improved?

Add me to the California Council of Churches mailing list: Yes No

Please return this reply form to
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