CREATING GENEROUS SPACES FOR LGBT STUDENTS ON A UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

By: Curtis VanderWaal, Ph.D.

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Creating Generous Spaces for LGBT Students on a University Campus

CURTIS VANDERWAAL, PHD
ANDREWS UNIVERSITY
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NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIANS IN SOCIAL WORK CONFERENCE
GRAND RAPIDS, MI
The Challenge
Changing Attitudes on Same-Sex Marriage, by Religious Affiliation

*Percent who favor same-sex marriage among...*

- **Religiously unaffiliated:**
  - 2001: 61%
  - 2013: 77%

- **White mainline Protestants:**
  - 2001: 40%
  - 2013: 48%

- **Catholics:**
  - 2001: 38%
  - 2013: 34%

- **Black Protestants:**
  - 2001: 30%

- **White evangelical Protestants:**
  - 2001: 13%
  - 2013: 24%

Source: Aggregated data from Pew Research Center polls conducted in each year. 2013 figures are based on one poll.

Pew Research Center • Updated March 2013
Generational Differences in Support for Same-sex Marriage
Among Republicans and White Evangelical Protestants

- **Millennial**: Republican: 50, White Evangelical Protestant: 43
- **Generation X**: Republican: 42, White Evangelical Protestant: 33
- **Baby Boomer**: Republican: 27, White Evangelical Protestant: 22
- **Silent Generation**: Republican: 18, White Evangelical Protestant: 19

SOURCE: Public Religion Research Institute, LGBT Issues and Trends Survey, February 2014 (N=4,609)
Conflict between Same-sex Marriage and Religious Beliefs

By Religious Affiliation

Percent who agree gay marriage goes against their religious beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Americans</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Evangelical Protestant</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Protestant</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Mainline Protestant</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffiliated</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceived Support for, or Opposition to, Same-sex Marriage

Do you think the following groups are mostly in favor of same-sex marriage or mostly opposed to same-sex marriage?

- **Mostly in favor**
- **Divided equally**
- **Mostly opposed**
- **Don’t know/Refused**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mostly in favor</th>
<th>Divided equally</th>
<th>Mostly opposed</th>
<th>Don’t know/Refused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People at your church or place of worship *</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your family</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americans overall</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your friends</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Asked of those who attend religious services at least a few times a year or more

Are Millennials Leaving Religion Over LGBT Issues?

Thinking about the reasons you are no longer affiliated with your childhood religion, how much of a factor, if at all, were negative religious teachings about or treatment of gay and lesbian people? *

Percent who say important factor

- Millennial (18-34): 31%
- Generation X (35-49): 23%
- Baby Boomer (50-64): 19%
- Silent Generation (65+): 17%

Religious groups are alienating young people by being too judgmental about gay and lesbian issues.

- Millennial: Agree 70%, Disagree 26%
- Generation X: Agree 58%, Disagree 34%
- Baby Boomer: Agree 53%, Disagree 39%
- Silent Generation: Agree 43%, Disagree 44%

Percentage Who Are Religiously Unaffiliated

- All Americans: 21%
- Millennials: 32%
- Generation X: 23%
- Baby Boomers: 16%
- Silent Generation: 10%

* Asked of people who were never religious, but are currently unaffiliated.
* Percent for Silent Generation Americans include less than 100 respondents (N=189) and should be interpreted with caution.

SOURCE: Public Religion Research Institute, LGBT Issues and Values Survey, February 2014 (PRRI#004-14)
91% of 16 – 29 year olds perceive Christians to be anti-gay


Implications for witness to those who consider Christians to be intolerant and bigoted
Andrews University – A Case Study
The Conflict Begins

- 2008 - Publication of *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives*  
  Eds: David Ferguson, Fritz Guy and David Larson
- 2009 – the Conference on Homosexuality at Andrews University
  - Filming for Seventh-Gay Adventist
- 2010 - Publication of *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church: Biblical, Counseling, and Religious Liberty Issues*. Eds: Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller and H. Peter Swanson
Unofficial support group

- President gives unofficial permission for faculty member to host an off-campus support group
- Permission to be Christian and LGBT
- 20-25 students
- Consistent themes
  - Past/current longing to be straight
  - Prayer & study to change
  - Deep shame and fear
  - Depression & suicide attempts (21 of 23 in first year group)
  - Longing for support & relationships
  - Desire for relationship with God (“wholesome”)
AULL4ONE
Andrews University’s Unofficial Gay-Straight Alliance

- Our mission is to create a safe and supportive space for all members, LGBTQ and straight alike, in which we foster meaningful discussions and create a welcoming atmosphere where everyone’s personal stories, perspectives, and ideas are valued.

- Our hope is to apply God’s golden rule to "Love thy neighbor as thyself" to the current conversations on Christianity, sexuality and identity.

- Our role is not to convict nor judge, but to show support, respect, and God's care for all. By following Christ's example, we hope to make our communities, our churches, and ourselves a living testimony of His love.

- Our name, AULL4One, has multiple meanings. AULL = Andrews University + all. Everyone here at AU is included- no one is left out. AULL for one reflects our unity as a group and as a family: we support each other unconditionally and accept everyone for who they are. AULL4ONE expresses our appreciation of individuality and the beautiful uniqueness and intrinsic value of each person.

- Most importantly, AULL4ONE signifies our focus on the One, Jesus Christ, and His inclusive message of love for all.
Creating Generous Spaces

- **Changes to Student Handbook - 2012**
  - Balancing commitment to the church’s positions on marriage (one man and one woman) and celibacy (orientation not sinful; sexual activity is) with the need to communicate safety, compassion and inclusiveness for all on campus
  - Consistency of celibacy across campus for unmarried
  - Protection against harassment, positive support & welcome
  - Standards on public display of affection for LGBT students

- **Creating a Faculty/Staff Support Network**
  - Extended Support Network
    - 20 handpicked faculty and staff
    - Training on empathy, listening and referral
    - Broader focus than just LGBT students
Creating Generous Spaces

- Creating events on campus
  - Debating the showing of “Seventh-gay Adventist” on campus; screening the film in Benton Harbor
  - Student Movement special edition – L, G, B & T stories represented as well as asexual
  - The Saturday afternoon event
    - David’s poem
  - The response by the opposition
    - Representatives from ex-gay ministries
  - Weekly Campus Ministries worship space – venue for student spiritual leaders to come out and maintain roles
Creating Generous Spaces

- Meetings with Campus Ministries to create a campus-based initiative on healthy sexuality
- Negative media – “Cupcakegate”
- SDA Theological Seminary statement on “The Bible and Homosexual Practices”
  - Part 1: distinguishes between orientation and practice, with practice clearly forbidden
  - Part 2: the need for compassion
- Creation of Intercollegiate Adventist GSA Coalition
Mission:

- In the spirit of Jesus’ ministry of love and Paul’s directive in II Corinthians 5:20 members of the IAGC are to be ambassadors of reconciliation. Therefore the IAGC is a student-run organization that seeks to bridge the LGBTQ community and the Seventh-day Adventist community within the academic setting. The IAGC seeks to promote understanding, compassion, education, awareness and community for those who wish to integrate their faith with their sexual and gender identities. The members of the IAGC strive to create a community of fellowship that affirms diversity while sowing seeds of love.
IAGC Initiatives

- Building student groups across seven campuses
- Developing short video clips – “What message do you have for SDA LGBTI individual who is struggling with your identity?”
- Tell Your Story initiative
- Scholarship development
2015 - The LGBTQ Student Life Practices & Policies Taskforce

- **Information gathering**
  - Benchmark with other Christian schools
  - Consult with church committees/initiatives
  - Understand legal landscape
  - Utilize reliable and relevant social sciences research

- **Goals**
  - Develop care and support systems for LGBTQ students
    - Which institutional structures do what – Counseling & Testing, Student Life, Campus Ministries, Office of Diversity, etc.
  - Create guidelines for LGBTQ student groups
  - Update student policies and handbook
    - LGB
    - Transgender
The LGBTQ Student Life Practices & Policies Taskforce

**Goals**
- Create housing & facilities policies
- Develop policies for same sex unions/marriage applicants
- Educate students, faculty, staff, parents & board
- Develop guidelines for student communications
  - Student Movement
  - Online social networks
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College/University (Location)</th>
<th>Official Group Name</th>
<th>Student Club Status</th>
<th>Institutional Involvement</th>
<th>Group Provides Peer Support</th>
<th>Group Provides Campus Education</th>
<th>Other LGBT Supports</th>
<th>Other LGBT Education</th>
<th>Unofficial Group Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheaton College (Wheaton, IL)</td>
<td><em>Refuge</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Led by Campus Chaplain</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No (only within group)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Chapel Speakers</td>
<td>OneWheaton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvin College (Grand Rapids, MI)</td>
<td><em>SAGA</em> (Sexuality &amp; Gender Awareness)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Led by Student Life Staff Member</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>• LGBTQ Discussion Groups (Counseling Office, Campus Ministries)</td>
<td>• Annual Sexuality Series</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle Pacific University (Seattle, WA)</td>
<td><em>Haven</em></td>
<td>Yes (est. 2013)</td>
<td>Advised by Faculty Member</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notre Dame University (South Bend, IN)</td>
<td><em>PrismND</em></td>
<td>Yes (est. 2013)</td>
<td>Advised by Faculty Member</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>• LGBTQ Discussion Groups (Gender Center, Counseling Office, Campus Ministries) • You Can Play (LGBT Athletes)</td>
<td>• LGBTQ101 • Active Ally Training</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2015 - Teen Homelessness Taskforce

**Motivations**
- Thoughtful, proactive, constructive & sustainable response to Cupcakegate
- Teen homelessness is a significant social problem – connects to AU commitment to social consciousness and “changing the world”
- Homeless teens are close in age to our college students
- A substantial portion of homeless teens are LGBT
- The SDA church needs to understand how to deal with family issues surrounding LGBT kids
Teen Homelessness Taskforce

- **Goals**
  - Educate students and community about teen homelessness
  - Partner with local and Chicago agencies around consciousness-raising, fundraising and events
  - Place interns from MSW/MDiv or MSW/Youth & Young Adult Ministry in one or two agencies
  - Develop a brief guide to help families with LGBT kids to deal compassionately and effectively with their kids (no theology)
Summary of Initiatives

- Gave LGBT students a voice in forums and committees
- Created (and continue to create) educational programming for campus
- Modified (and continue to modify) campus policies to be protective and welcoming
- Developed a support group for LGBT students
- Created a faculty/staff support network
- Developed an outreach taskforce to address one aspect of LGBT challenge - homelessness
Necessary Elements of Supportive Environment

- Stay within church teachings
  - Focus on central Biblical teaching of love, not church purity
- Need good will and protection on the part of upper level administrators – education may be needed
- Need campus education around gender and sexual identity
- Move forward carefully and with wisdom – evolution, not revolution
  - Careful planning (proactive vs. reactive)
  - Involve ALL stakeholders, including those who may oppose
- Involve LGBT students in planning
The Challenge to the Church

“When religion closes people up in their own particular group, it puts belonging to the group, and its success and growth, above love and vulnerability towards others; it no longer nourishes and opens the heart. When this happens, religion becomes an ideology, that is to say, a series of ideas that we impose on ourselves, as well as on others; it closes us up behind walls. When religion helps us open our hearts in love and compassion to those who are not of our faith so as to help them to find the source of freedom within their own hearts and to grow in compassion and love of others, then this religion is a source of life....

The Way Forward: Generous Spaciousness

- “Paul says when we encounter a genuine believer who disagrees with us we need to accept them, without quarreling, without viewing them with contempt, and without a judgmental attitude.”

- “Imagine if that actually became our posture toward one another in this contentious conversation at the intersection of faith and sexuality. Imagine if we didn’t back one another into a corer demanding to know where we stand on this question of convenanted same-sex relationships as the ultimate orthodoxy test. Imagine if we did not judge the heart’s motivation of those who conclude differently than we do. Imagine if we ceased showing contempt to those who disagree with us. Imagine if we stopped our quarreling. Imagine if we not longer put stumbling blocks in the way of those who were deeply wrestling with these questions and desperately needing some safe space to search out God’s heart and will for them. If all those things were true, we would be experiencing the richness of generous spaciousness.”

Wendy VanderWal-Gritter, Generous Spaciousness: Responding to Gay Christians in the Church, p. 183.