BUILDING INCLUSIVE CHURCHES: ENGAGING WITH HUMAN SEXUALITY AND GENDER IDENTITIES

Training Module for Churches

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National Council of Churches in India

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Message from the President, NCCI

It gives me immense joy to see this venture of the NCCI to engage and educate churches in the area of human sexuality and gender identities bear fruit. It is with commitment to the excluded that we launch this training module. As churches, in spite of our hesitancy and hurdles to engage with a sensitive issue like this, we have come a long way in being able to understand and realize various life realities of those marginalized due to their sexuality and gender identities. In fact, I am now worried whether we are already too late to be able to bring back those we have lost, to embrace those who have been pained and to bring relief to those who have given up hope a long time ago.

In fulfilment of Christ’s calling to, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” and to realize that in Christ, there is life in abundance, (John 10: 10), I am glad that this venture gives us as churches, an opportunity to listen, understand and engage with those marginalised because of their gender identities or sexuality. We as Christians have to embrace those who are different from us and have had to go through much pain in life right from their young age because of such discrimination.

Let us strive to be a loving, life-giving and a life affirming community. I wish the NCCI ESHA Team and all those associated with this venture, God’s abundant grace and guidance, as they undertake the next stages of this difficult venture.

With prayers and blessings,

Most Rev P. C. Singh
President, NCCI and
Moderator, Church of North India
Preface

The journey of the NCCI in the area of human sexuality and gender identities, particularly in engaging with those marginalized due to their sexuality and gender identities, reaches a significant milestone through the development of this training module. NCCI started this journey as early as in 2001, when we had the First Study Institute on Human Sexuality, when church leaders came together at an ecumenical level and engaged with the LGBTIQA+ communities for the first time. We have come a long way in being able to understand key issues and create a platform of dialogue, where a dynamic process of sharing of life stories was started. We recognize here, with much humility, that this process of sharing struggles and joys in a community, with confidence and openness, has continued over all these years. There is now a synergy between those marginalized and the visible Church in the form of you and me, empowered by the presence and discerning guidance of the Spirit of God. We are grateful to God today that we are much richer in our journey, from the stage where we started about two decades ago.

We take this opportunity to acknowledge with much gratitude, all those who have been a part of this journey since 2001, as staff of the NCCI and all those who have passionately given their inputs, particularly during difficult moments in their lives. It is because of their commitment that we have been able to reach this stage, when we can realistically look ahead with much hope and courage. We are particularly grateful to those friends from the marginalized communities, for their loving hearts, patience and perseverance to journey with us, we are indeed indebted to each one of you for your invaluable contributions.

With your prayerful support, we are assured that this journey will guide us towards building inclusive communities, accepting each other, creating safe spaces of understanding, love and care.

We take this opportunity to convey our best wishes to the dedicated staff of the NCCI and the Core Team members for making this journey a beautiful and cherished one.

Prayerful wishes,

Rev Asir Ebenezer
Secretary, Christian Service Agency
General Secretary, NCCI
Introduction

This module strives to engage us towards the realisation of the NCCI Quadrennial Theme, Towards Just and Inclusive Communities, in its full essence. We recognised that the active participation of those of marginalized sexualities and gender identities, was of crucial importance in the creation of this module. Their being included in this process and being provided the space to share their stories of success and of personal struggles has been inspirational in the making of the module, as well as in the process of implementing it. Throughout this module we have changed original names for those who courageously shared their life stories and wanted to protect their identity and keep their confidentiality.

Dialogue and discussion among church leaders, pastors, theologians and allies with the active accompaniment of those marginalised due to their sexualities and gender identities has brought out a rare blend of synergy, which we hope will be beneficial in our journey towards building inclusive communities. I acknowledge here that the process of working with pastors and identified “trainers” from churches, (named by their churches), has helped the Core Group working on this module, to situate the content in the context of the churches. It has paved the way for engaging the churches on principles of inclusion. The edited text shared with the same group, several times, for over a year, was critical for incorporating suggestions from participants on how it can be improved. Their interest in sharing with the Core group what needs to be communicated to congregations and how it can best be communicated was an important step in the process.

The Module suggests a clearly marked role for facilitators who will be pastors and elders from churches. The Module can be most effectively used by those who have been trained to use it and the ESHA Project of the NCCI is planning a series of training workshops and we hope the NCCI member churches will make use of them. The Module recommends the use of experts, doctors, theologians, sociologists to explain scientific facts, or Bible texts that are problematic. It sets out simple ground rules for engagement. It is still open for adaptation to the context in which it is being used.

The module is divided into five sections and suggests 17 sessions. Section I is only for Facilitators of the Module. Section II, III, IV and V contain sessions that facilitators can use to sensitize small communities of church members.
to promote inclusion in churches. Section II contains four sessions that promote a theological understanding for promoting inclusion. Section III contains 8 sessions to help participants from churches to understand and value diversity. Three of these sessions promote positive parenting for the non-binary child. Section IV helps participants prepare action plans for promoting inclusion. Section V lists resources and references needed.

The sections deal with the biblical foundations of an inclusive church; the scientific facts about gender and sex; and the understanding that as the Church of Jesus Christ we are called to inclusivity and respectful acceptance. The Module defines terms and helps correct commonly held views and misconceptions about diversity. It also offers information on legally available provisions while encouraging congregations and others using this Module to recognise how they can continue in acts of solidarity with those marginalised due to their sexuality and gender identities. The Module suggests walking with the marginalised communities to learn from them, using rights-based approaches rather than a sympathiser/victim approach.

May I take this opportunity to convey our deep gratitude to the Core Team of experts, namely Dr Aruna Gnanadason, Ms Edwina Pereira, Ms Rachana Mudraboyina, Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia and Rev Dr Allan Pallanna who have worked tirelessly in making this module a success. Our deep appreciation to all dear friends who have taken much effort to share their stories in this module.

Looking forward to share this journey with you all.

Yours in Christ,

Fr Thomas Ninan
General Coordinator, NCCI - ESHA
“Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.” Ps. 139:16
Milestones towards inclusivity

At the heart of Christian faith is the core spirituality which each Christian is called to follow: Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

At the heart of all our human relationships is the desire to know and to be known. This desire which is a gift from God as a consequence of being created in the image of God makes all human relationships possible.

Sexuality is characteristic of our being created in the image of God and has the potential to facilitate our becoming in God.

Sexuality is essentially relational and involves human relations with the self, the other and the divine.

A theological conversation on sexuality will further enable the church’s self-understanding and witness as a welcoming and affirming community, making space within which the human rights and dignity of all will be upheld.

1 Extracts from An Ecumenical Document on Human Sexuality of the National Council of Churches in India, 2011. Refer Appendix 1 for details.
LET’S START WITH THE STORY OF ANJALI EVANGELIST

I am born as a boy but was a girl from inside.

My name is Anjali Evangelist but when I was born the name given to me by my parents was Ravi. I was born as the last boy child after four brothers in my family. From my childhood I used to like to play with girls, forge friendships with them and do all the household work that are normally considered female tasks - like cooking food, washing clothes and cleaning the house. I am a regular visitor to the Sunday school run by the Church in our neighbourhood. I used to be praised by the neighbours because I used to help my mother in all household work and used to teach the children who come to Sunday school. When I reached puberty, things started changing. The same neighbours who used to praise me as a child, now started criticising me saying: “Why can’t you just behave like a boy?” or “Why are you behaving like a girl?” etc.

This became a burden on my mother and my brothers. Once when I returned from school there was a family meeting. My mother and four brothers surrounded me and started asking me many questions “Why are you behaving like a girl? Because of you our family honour is damaged!”, “Can’t you behave like a boy?”, “If you are not going to change your feminine behaviour then leave the family.” My brothers beat me badly and left me unconscious. My mother revived me and gave me food and said “Why don’t you listen to your brothers’ words, why can’t you change your behaviour and be a boy?”

I felt that staying with my family could be risky for me, so I fled to Mumbai with the help of the local Hijra community and friends. I joined in the Hijra system - a community of trans persons who often live together and support each other. Many live with their own families – if their identity is accepted). I started begging on the trains and on main roads of Mumbai. After 2 years my health has affected as I was infected with jaundice and I came back to my home. My mother took care of my health and my brothers again started threatening me saying that if I wanted to stay with them, I needed to cut my hair and live like a ‘boy’.

I ran away once again to Hyderabad and there I joined the Hijra community and started begging on the streets. In Hyderabad I had the sex reassignment surgery done. Meanwhile, with the help of few trans friends in Hyderabad I was instrumental in starting a YouTube channel to sensitise mainstream society regarding trans issues. The name of the channel is ‘Trans-vision’. I hosted the Telugu series for the first series of the channel and also won the regional, South Asia ‘Laadli’ award for gender sensitisation in the year 2018.

After my surgery my heart turned me to serve Jesus Christ, and I went back to the church. Slowly the brothers and sisters in different churches started inviting me

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1 Original name not disclosed for confidentiality.
to their meetings and gatherings to speak as a trans persons who believes in Jesus Christ. Now every week I go to one such gathering. I have also started my own YouTube channel to convey my experiences with my faith and my perceptions of the Christian community - the name of this channel is “Suvaarthanjali”.

My favourite verses from the Bible are found in Isaiah 56:3-5:

3 Neither let the son of the stranger, that joined to the Lord, say, “The Lord will surely separate me from his people”: and do not let the eunuch say, “I am just a dry tree.”

4 For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me, and hold fast my covenant;

5 I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.
SECTION I

PREPARING THE FACILITATOR AND THE COMMUNITY FOR THE JOURNEY

1. GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATORS

PROFILE OF A FACILITATOR

The Promoting Inclusive Churches (PIC) Module needs a facilitator who leads and moderates every session. This person is a friendly mentor because the person in this role requires a friendly, inclusive approach. The person must have the ability to be a ‘Mentor’ as this person is walking an untrodden path and helps church communities to make inclusive choices.

Who can fit into this role? It is important for the facilitator to have gone through a standardised training programme conducted by the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) or a similar competent organisation, so that they can answer many questions that might arise during the sessions in this Module. Anyone who is trained, and who empathises with people of diverse sexualities and genders can lead, moderate and facilitate such a programme. The facilitator could be a student peer educator, an NGO activist, a Church leader, a theologian, or a professor.

Inspired by a Biblical vision of justice and of an inclusive church, the facilitator upholds the JAR values of Justice, Autonomy and Respect:

- **Justice**: This value upholds the rights of every individual. Therefore, any participant’s right to a set of attitudes, values or choice of responses to various activities; or their sexual and reproductive health; must be viewed from a Rights based perspective.

- **Autonomy**: Since all human beings are born with inherent rights, a participant has the freedom to make decisions, have their own values, beliefs, opinions and perceptions with regards to any issue, provided they are aware of their responsibility not to harm themselves or others. Their freedom comes with the responsibility for their actions of respecting and upholding the rights of others as well as of themselves. It would also require their ability to grant permission to everyone to express their views or to ask questions even if it may seem silly to another. Agreeing to disagree can help set the tone. This Module is not about forcing opinions on others.

- **Respect**: It is important for facilitators to role model how to maintain the dignity of each person. This could be by maintaining confidentiality (of keeping any private information that was expressed by any participant as confidential). Facilitators can reinforce that respect will need to be given despite differences of opinions, values or perceptions.
GENERAL TIPS FOR THE FACILITATOR

· The facilitator must
  
  o Understand the differences between sex and gender, diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Study the appendix in this manual that defines all the terms you will need to use. Also read and study Handout 5 that is included in this volume.

  o Encourage open discussion on sexuality and gender identities

  o Engage with theological and biblical references

  o Have a commitment to reach out to churches for promoting inclusion

· The facilitator must read through the training module, get familiar with the activities and practice the use of verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Discussing something that is not normally spoken of openly in our churches in a mixed group of men, women and others, such as issues related to sexuality and our bodies can be awkward for some. In such a context the facilitator’s role is important – he/she should be conscious of facial expressions and the words used. The facilitator should be confident, and at the same time, ensure that the topic is not rushed through. Show seriousness about some myths associated with the topic which may be voiced, and explain how these misconceptions cause discrimination, exclusion and rejection.

· It is important that the facilitator is non-judgemental while discussing sex and sexuality. For example, in discussing gender and sexual orientation, words such as ‘detestable’ or ‘unnatural love’ etc. should not be used at all.

· Managing time is critical in conducting these sessions. If an active discussion diverts the topic, it is the responsibility of the facilitator to skilfully bring the group back to focus. The facilitator could say, ‘What you are discussing is very important. However, let’s continue with the module and you may find the answer later or we will set apart time for this discussion outside the time-frame of this Module’.

SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS TO FACILITATORS IN CONDUCTING THE INCLUSION IN CHURCHES (PIC) MODULE

· The facilitator must reach the venue in advance and ensure that the volunteers are positioned for distributing hand-outs.

· In case of non-availability of LCD or power failure, the facilitator must have prints to be prepared to show important charts.

· A public address system may be very useful when addressing more than 100 participants.

· Load the VCD/DVD before the session starts so that it is ready to play

· Keep the hand-outs readily stacked or handed over to volunteers before the session begins.
It is assumed that the facilitator is familiar with the church and the clergy in the locality. It is always better to visit the church and meet the clergy before the programme. The facilitator must also understand the cultural ethos of the region and make efforts to avoid cultural or religious mistakes in words or behaviour. Sex and sexuality are sensitive topics and it is safe to approach this with scientific rigour rather than creating a protracted debate on any issue related to the topic under discussion.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The Promoting Inclusion in Churches (PIC) Module is prepared on the basis that participants require adult learning methodologies for meaningful behaviour change. The methods in the PIC Module are interactive, and fun based. Experiential learning games are used in the PIC Module. Detailed steps for using each method are explained. Tips for the facilitator are included in each stage as found appropriate. Being an adult learning Module, the facilitator is encouraged to draw from the exercise points to link them with the following Sessions. Tips for drawing points are included in the PIC Module. Most of the activities are group based. However, there is extensive reference made to the Bible which requires the participants to reflect on and then participate. The facilitator is required to be skilled in using both group and individualised deep private exercises within the time as indicated.

To facilitate the activities in a lively and interesting way, the facilitator could use non-verbal and verbal skills as detailed below:

Non-verbal facilitation skills

- Make eye contact with everyone in the group. Focus attention on all the participants—do not favour some over others.
- Move around the room as the facilitator.
- Show participants that the facilitator is listening to what participants are saying by nodding, smiling and even responding to them. Repeat what a participant says, so that you can be sure that all have heard the response.
- Facilitators need not be experts on an issue. They need to believe in the ministry of inclusion. Invite experts, a doctor, a theologian, or an activist to a session, if need be.
- If facilitators do not know something, they are encouraged to admit it. If a participant raises a difficult question, facilitators could ask if anyone in the group knows the answer and allow them to answer it. Encourage good questions or thoughtful questions. If you as the facilitator are unable to answer a question or was not able to find the answer from within the group, the facilitator should let participants know that the answer would be found out by and shared later.

Verbal facilitation skills

- When preparing to lead sessions, formulate your questions to encourage the right kind of responses and to facilitate open discussions. All modules have sufficient questions that could be asked to participants. You could make your own set of questions based on the participants needs.
- Use open-ended questions such as, ‘What do you think about…?’ ‘Why…?’ ‘How…?’
• Use snowball techniques to enrich information that is provided to the participants. In other words, after one of the participants makes a statement, ask other participants for their opinions and so on.
• Encourage participants to talk. The best and ideal situation is when they are able to talk more than you.
• Encourage the participants to answer each other’s questions, e.g. if a participant asks you a question ‘what do you think about...?’ refer the question to others in the room and ask them for their opinion. In that way, everyone can learn to listen and to show respect for each other.
• Repeat important points made by the participants to reinforce them.
• Encourage participants to share personal experiences to articulate their views or opinions. Reinforce the ground rules ‘justice, autonomy and respect’.
• You may find that participants may want to share personal issues with you. Remember that if you are not able to address such issues, help can be provided to any participant who may require it, after the session.
• Facilitators must assert that, in the spirit of respecting diversity and difference - abusive or insulting behaviour is not acceptable. Words and ideas that are prejudicial and stereotyped against particular groups of people (based on their sexual orientation, gender diversity, age, cultural background, behaviour, religion or physical abilities etc) should be challenged by facilitator.
• Facilitators can encourage discussions and allow participants to agree to disagree with others opinions, respectfully.

Materials required are indicated for each Section – be well prepared with all that is needed. As much as is possible, the PIC Module encourages the use of materials that are readily available in a church setting.

FOLLOW UP AND EVALUATION

Planning and implementing follow-up activities enables church participants to retain what they learnt. The PIC Module does not include activities in the follow-up period. Retreats, Prayers, Exhibitions, plays, poster competitions, debating competitions, featured speakers including trans men and women can be invited to address any issue related to any aspect of the PIC Module - as follow-up activities to keep the group interested and engaged. These activities could differ from church to church. Facilitators could keep a note of each activity of churches and convey this information to the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) for sharing in their Newsletter. Examples of what other churches have done in their follow up period are included in the PIC Module as in Session 15.

For more information contact the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI)

Contact:

General Coordinator
ESHA Project, National Council of Churches in India
Christian Council Campus, Civil Lines
Nagpur, Maharashtra 440 001
Email: esha@ncci1914.com
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2. PRE-SESSION FOUNDATION

OBJECTIVES AND COMMITMENTS

This activity is for all who participate in these sessions – it offers constructive advice on preparation of a group for these sensitive discussions.

During the Pre-session Foundation activity, participants will

- Discuss the objectives for the training programme as given in Handout 1 printed at the end of this Activity
- Make commitments to ground rules for the programme in Handout 2 printed at the end of this Activity.

30 minutes

White board and marker pens, Chart paper, marker pens, board to pin chart on LCD projection facilities

- Introduce the objectives of the Promoting Inclusion in Churches Module to participants using an LCD projector and a power point presentation or by writing it on a white board. Go through with the group the Objectives of the Module using Handout 1.
- Share that for the objectives to be achieved, all need to make some commitments. Encourage participants to come out with commitments. Write “I commit...” on the chart and list their sharing.
- Ensure that all commitments given below are included.
- Encourage participants to come forward and sign the commitments to show their compliance to them.

Our words are important. If we commit to something, it promotes relationships and the focus needed to reach the objectives we set.
HANDOUT 1

OBJECTIVES OF THIS TRAINING MODULE

Through the Promoting Inclusion in Churches Module, participants will

· Re-construct the theological basis for including LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual + other sexual minorities) + persons in our churches and explore some relevant Bible passages.

· Recognise and listen to the voices of the LGBTQIA+ persons in strengthening their faith journeys

· Describe Church based actions that demonstrate inclusion and a Christ-like church as a community of equals

· Collaborate with LGBTQIA+ persons and forums for promoting inclusion in churches and challenging discrimination.

HANDOUT 2

MY COMMITMENTS CHART

I COMMIT TO....

Keep an open mind and seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance.
Keep mobile phones on silent (or off)
Speak one at a time
Ensure that everyone participates
Respect everyone’s opinions even if you disagree
Avoid side-talking
Listen to everyone
Keep personal information shared private and confidential (if requested).
Ask questions if something is not clear
Agree to disagree
SECTION 2

THEOLOGICAL AND ECCLESIOLOGICAL GROUNDINGS FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

SESSION 1
INTRODUCING A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTING INCLUSION

Introduction

The facilitator can read this introduction before the session and present it to the group.

Session 1 is prepared to create the conditions and climate for understanding human sexuality and appreciating our sexuality as given by God. The topic of sex and sexuality is a taboo topic in the Indian churches. As it is shrouded in secrecy – talking about it creates an unhealthy and unhygienic environment. Church communities hesitate to talk about sex and sexual pleasure. What the church has done by its silence is to hand over that responsibility to the media and the entertainment industry, which sometimes distort human relationships. Myths and misconceptions about sexuality lead to unhealthy practices. If the church will provide a healthy and respectful environment for the discussion or response to issues related to human sexuality; those who are victims of sexual abuse, especially those with sexual diversity, will be able to face up to and challenge discrimination and violence they face in society, and sometimes even within the church.

Session 1 equips the participants with the theoretical and reflective basis for promoting inclusion.

During this Session participants will be able to

- Affirm and celebrate life and sexuality as God’s creative gift.
- Explore and understand the affirmative, life-giving texts on sexuality in the Bible.
- Expose the hetero-sexist, stereotyped, exclusive Biblical passages that are used against sexuality and against sexual minorities.

60 minutes

Objectives

Time

Materials Needed

- Paper and pen for participants for writing perspectives and positions on homophobia. Display Board and appropriate writing material to collect the replies of the participants and display it for the attention of all.
- Chart or Projector to display life-stories and struggles of sexual minorities.
Step 1: The facilitator can present the contents for this Session as is described below:

**Understanding Sexuality Theologically**

A person’s identity is usually defined through culture-bound lenses such as tradition, race and sexuality. Through the centuries, birth rituals in various communities have identified maleness and femaleness as markers of the identity of the child. The first question posed when a child is born, is often: Is it a boy or a girl? Traditions are often drawn from religious understandings, scriptural passages and practices. In summary, what defines a person boils down to what the prevailing religious and cultural heritage dictates!

**Being Male and Female?**

Within the Christian tradition the most dominant understanding of the human person, in terms of sexuality, is that of being male and female. Genesis 1:27 appears to suggest this distinctive human category: ‘So God created Adam in his image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.’ Further in Genesis 2, we see God creating Eve out of Adam for ‘it is not good for man to be alone’. In the Bible, the relationship between a man and a woman, especially in marriage, became an analogy for the relationship between human beings and God. Sexuality as being defined as maleness and femaleness acquires a spiritual dimension. There is a logical progression in terms of the purpose of God creating man and woman - primarily for companionship and for procreation (‘to be fruitful and multiply’).

Thus sexuality and sexual relations could only be understood as being heterosexual and perhaps, monogamous and its only purpose, being procreation. As was the separation of light and darkness, land and waters, earth and sky, male and female were made out to be unique, distinct, non-ambiguous categories of the human person and this defined the identity of human beings. What is legitimate and what is illegitimate in human relationships began to be governed by laws from Leviticus and other exhortations in Old Testament times. As regards sexual conduct, there were clearly laid down rules meant for harmonious existence and for maintaining order in the community. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are often interpreted to legitimise this dominant idea of preserving community life. Through the Christian centuries, sexuality was relegated to a lower order and the pursuit of chastity and sexual abstinence was highlighted as having the greatest religious and spiritual value.

**The Creation Passages and Supposed Duality**

We turn to the Bible and theology to underline the discussion in this module is inspired by a commitment to create an inclusive community as revealed to us in the Bible and the Church’s theology.
Letty Russell the theologian writes: “It seems to me that God does not like uniformity in human life and community or in nature. It seems that God’s intention is to “remove all the bars” and create a world of riotous difference. The writers of the biblical story of creation in Genesis describe just such a world. Each time God creates life of another kind, there is the refrain: “And God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:25). At the end of the creation story God even saw that it was very good!”

But as we know, from here the Bible moves on towards building of towers (Gen. 11 – the Tower of Babel) – differences among us gain ascendancy, the lust for power over others grips us – all this is part of the problem of sin. Perhaps if we analyse why we fear difference, we can see more clearly how to embrace difference as a gift from God.

The words of the theologian quoted above remind us of our obligation to celebrate diversity is all aspects of God’s creation, including the way we express our sexuality, because diversity is part of God’s intention in creation. God sees all of creation “as very good” (Gen. 1: 31) and we, humans, because of our sinfulness build walls of prejudice and abuse; so that some forms of relationships are considered what is normal and all others are condemned as “sinful”.

There are two other Biblical texts which explore God’s intention of creating a “world of riotous difference” and blessing it! Let us look closer at the story of Babel – this story is recorded in Genesis 11:1-9. It is a story of power where human beings build a tower to establish their dominion over one another! God stops this by shattering their system of power and scattering them over the face of the earth endowing them with many languages – stressing that in diversity is the celebration of life, thus liberating those who have been forced to follow one way of life. This should empower us as Christians and the churches to affirm diversity, offering hospitality to those excluded because they are different.

The story of Pentecost, (Acts 2:1-21), is not the reversal of the Babel event – it is not a uniting into one language again, as it is sometimes unfortunately interpreted. The text does say that the people who gathered assembled with their own languages and cultures – but the Holy Spirit empowered them to understand each other. The unity we enjoy in the Spirit draws us all together – there are no margins and no one is on the margins! This is the kind of unity and hospitality we celebrate around the Eucharistic Table with the Triune God offering us all welcome. “All” is the key word here – women and men, straight and gay, trans men and trans women, Dalit and non-Dalit, rich and poor…all find acceptance and hospitality in the church!

Genesis 2:22-25 offers the second creation account. From this
account, we assume:

1. the complementarity of the male and the female to reflect the fullness of the human being created in the image of God
2. the principle that we are created for relationship—to be in relationship
3. but it also reveals the unequal duality between the two of them - with the man holding power

This kind of theology is what has formed the basis of Christian prohibitions against LGBTQIA+ people. There are only two persons in this narrative: male and female. Anything else in unimaginable Biblically and theologically and it does not reflect God's design is what we have been taught. This theology, pervasive in so many Christian communities, makes two grievous errors in regard to our tradition:

It makes LGBTQIA+ people less than fully human, as not created in the image of God. “God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.”“God made us he and she, not they and them”. Our response to such claims should be: “Well, then, who do you think made Steve? Who do you think made ‘them?’”

This way of reading the text privileges one kind of relationship—heterosexual monogamous marriage—to the exclusion of everything else. It affirms that we were created to be in relationship but then denies relationships between all else – it is reduced to the relationship between the wife and husband in a monogamous union.

Diversity in Creation beyond Duality

In Genesis 1, in the first creation story, God creates day/night, light/darkness, earth/water and on the sixth day, God creates humans, the male and the female. We assume that God created many dualities and so many dichotomies in creation—so many “either/or” choices. Or are they either/or choices? In the fullness of God’s creation, the dichotomies do not point us to either/or but rather to both/and.

Day/Night or Light/Darkness—there is both dawn and dusk. And those times, according to the Daily Office in the Christian prayer cycle or in the Call to Prayer of Muslims, are times of the day when we are drawn especially close to God.

Land/Water—there are coastlines and estuaries and tidal basins. Places where land and water meet. And they are beautiful places of life and abundance.

Earth/Sky—there is a boundless horizon that provides a point from which to imagine new worlds, to set off on voyages, to make new discoveries. The horizon pushes us past our limits into the place of revelation.
Male/Female—there are humans created in the image of God who reveal elements of both in countless combinations: an LGBTQIA+ kaleidoscope. They - our friends, siblings, parents, neighbours, parishioners, ourselves - revealing the diversity of God's good creation. Like the dawn and the dusk, the coastline and the horizon, they remind us that God's creation covers a rainbow spectrum and cannot be divided into either/or categories.

God is opening up new revelations that there is much light that is still to break forth from these Scriptures. And when that happens, we will all be better able to see the abundance and diversity of God's creation—an abundance we can only imagine. Opening the doors of our hearts and our churches to our LGBTQIA+ neighbours is not an act so much of Christian compassion for them alone—after all, God has not deserted them. Opening our hearts and our churches is an act of worship on our part so that we may more fully know and love God.

**Step 2:** Divide the participants into groups of up to 10 and give them 30 minutes to discuss among themselves with the following questions to guide the discussion:

**Questions**

What are the aspects that define who a person should be?

Who created all human beings ‘fearfully and wonderfully’ – discuss the importance of recognising this and how can we live it out in our communities?

Can there only be male and female?

Should sexuality be confined only to heterosexual relationships?

What has love got to do between persons in all relationships?

- All people are created in God’s image wonderfully irrespective of their sexual and gender diversity
SESSION 2
CORE CHRISTIAN VALUES

During this session, participants will discuss the following:

- **In the Jesus community,** all feel welcome – with all our diversities of caste, class and sexualities.
- **Justice** is a Christian value that cannot be compromised – all have the right to express their sexuality and have the right to equal access to health and medical facilities when needed. Families will be treated equally.
- **Hospitality** is a core foundation of the Christian community. All are welcome to the church and among Christian communities.
- A Christian lifestyle demands **respect** for our differences and understanding that we are all made in the image of God. Therefore, all have to be treated with respect and love.

3 hours

Marker pens, Sheets of chart paper with the following words written on them
- Community
- Justice
- Hospitality
- Respect

- Divide the participants into four groups.
- Explain the Core values related to promoting sexual and gender equality and health include choice, dignity, diversity, equality, respect, tolerance, inclusion and a rights perspective.
- Continue by saying that

  - Everybody can exercise their informed choices as long as it does not hurt self and others.
  - Human beings enjoy dignity and need to be treated well.
  - All human beings are unique and precious and the diversity they offer must be accepted and valued.
  - All have the right to equality as enshrined in the Constitution and in other Human Rights laws and provisions.
We need to be respected irrespective of our sexual and gender diversities.

A society practising acceptance promotes enjoyment of the above core values which aid in promoting inclusion. All the values listed are followed taking a Rights based approach.

- Distribute two core values to each group. (choice, dignity, diversity, equality, respect, tolerance, inclusion and rights perspective.)
- Give participants 15-20 minutes to create their dumb charade (action without words) illustrating the word they received. This they will then act out their dumb charade and the other groups will guess the word without it being spoken. For example, if the word is Respect, the scenario could depict a child bowing and touching the feet of an elder.
- When a group recognises the core value correctly, write the word on the white board and give the group who guessed it a point. Continue till all eight core values are demonstrated and guessed.
- Explain that values are the cement that binds congregations in the Christian faith. These very values cement sexuality, gender equality and health.
- Brainstorm with the group to identify in what moments in his ministry, Jesus promoted these values.
- Conclude that no matter how unique a human being is, they are created by God. Their diversity needs to be celebrated. Diversity is the mirror of the one body in Christ.

- No matter how unique a human being is, they are created by God.
- Their identity needs to be celebrated.
- Diversity in identity is the mirror of the one body of Christ.
SESSION 3
HOSPITALITY IN A WORLD OF RIOTOUS DIFFERENCE

During this session participants will

- Discuss God’s creation and examine creation with its diversities.
- Examine ‘hospitality’ in the Jesus community

60 minutes

White board and marker pens, paper and pen for each participant,

- Divide participants into groups of 7-10. Give each person a paper and pen
- After 10 minutes, encourage each person to note down one unique feature of the others in the circle – it could be the colour of one’s clothes; the length of hair, height. For 10 minutes each one shares what they noted.
- Initiate a discussion about difference and how natural and important it is that each person is different from the other person.
- Discuss Christian hospitality as in the box below.

Hospitality works both ways - both the one who shows hospitality and the one who receives it – all are benefited! Today, in India, some of us assembled here belong to the group with the privileges – of caste, education, economic status, and even sexual privilege as one belonging to the dominant heterosexual community – we often claim the space and dominate the discourse. But then when one of us enters a community/family of a trans person or of a gay and lesbian person or any other oppressed/minority community, we are the one who need to wait for their acceptance and welcome and when they do express it, we are all blessed!
• Discuss for 15 minutes in groups – what does this feel like both for the dominant group and for the minority

• Sexual diversity is given by God as we were created with all our diversity.

• A fresh understanding of human sexuality and gender – of gender identities, of sexuality and sexual pleasure is needed.

• As a Christian community, we have no option but to be hospitable to all – in the Jesus community of which we are a part; all are welcome whatever their class, caste, gender or sexual orientation.

• As Christians and as the Churches we are also obligated to walk with the weakest – those who are shunned by society – we must be ready to stand up for the rights of all to live with dignity and justice.

• We have to accompany all who require medical care. Christian hospitals have a Jesus opportunity to provide special facilities for the health and well-being of LGBTQIA+ persons.

HANDOUT 3

Loving God and loving our neighbours

“Jesus lived a perfect life, (not in the way the laws of the world define it), but in full obedience to the law of God in thought, word, and deed. Jesus’ mission wasn’t simply to die on the cross for our sins but also to live a life of perfect righteousness. Jesus summarizes the Law of God with two commandments: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:37–40). This is certainly an admirable goal, but has anyone ever loved the Lord with all one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength and one’s neighbour as oneself? Everything we do, say, and think has to be done, said, and thought from the perspective of the love for God and love for neighbour. If we are completely honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we have never achieved this level of spirituality.” writes the theologian Wayne Grudem. (Slightly adapted).

Perhaps we feel we cannot live this perfect life…. But by loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and by loving our neighbors as ourselves we can take a step closer to the vision laid out by Christ. Loving our neighbours with all our heart is not as simple as it sounds – it is easy to love those in our family or in a close circle or those who belong to our own community……but to love the one who is different; the one who lives a life that is rejected by many; who has been reduced to beg on the streets or survive by any means possible….it is then that perfection will be reached. To love to perfection is to create the conditions for every single person to live a healthy life of justice and abundance.
The Christian community is defined by the Word of God—hospitality, respect and love

- If we would take the Word as our leading light, we would give every person that we come into contact with, a basic level of respect and kindness.
- We would show more concern towards others in need and be more willing to lend a helping hand.
- We would be more understanding and accepting of the differences in others.

If everyone on the planet showed this kind of tolerance towards each other, there would be a lot of more harmony and peace and acceptance of difference. The truth is that all forms of discrimination come from a place of fear. Intolerance is caused by the fear of a loss of power, which creates an overwhelming need to control others with what one believes to be the truth. Like any other belief system, myopic views on diversity are influenced by early conditioning.

Most of us in India grow up in families where discussions on sexuality are usually not permitted and there is an atmosphere of prejudice against LGBTQIA+ persons - we are taught to be cautious of people who were different from us and therefore, inevitably we are prone to being afraid of accepting those different from us. On the other hand, if one grows up in a diverse locality with parents who encourage us to mingle with everyone, we would be more open to embracing others who are different from us.

We grow up in a church where we do not speak of sexuality but yet, in recent times we see how particularly transwomen and men have broken various barriers in the church and have taught us valuable lessons on respect and love.

Today many Christian communities and even some churches “recognize that the source of power in their life is the love of Christ which inspires and directs them” and not humanly constructed laws or ways of behaviour based on a limited understanding of human relationships.

The Church ought to embody more the love of Christ and help to reinterpret the laws of the land through the lens of the teachings of Christ, so as to critique what is unjust in the laws and make them more accessible to all. Laws need to create a safe just space for all citizens whatever be their caste, class or sexual identity. The added value of looking at the laws through a Christian/church lens is that we add to the criteria of the purpose of all laws the desire to serve the least in the society. As church our purpose is to reach those most disadvantaged by socially, economically and politically erected structures of “graded subjugation” as the woman theologian Elizabeth Shussler Fiorenza describes it.
SESSION 4
JESUS’ CALL FOR INCLUSION

In this session participants will examine the Bible for describing how Jesus valued inclusion (protecting diversity)

60 minutes

The Bible, Hymn Book, note book and pen

- Welcome participants and divide them into four groups.
- Ask three groups to choose from the Bible situations where Jesus broke the rules/laws/customs in order to reach out to people.
- Encourage participants to list laws Jesus broke to include all.
- Go around each group and invite each group to enact a scene from one of the Bible texts they have chosen. Ensure that each group chooses a different scene.
- Ask group 4 to read the story of the intersex person known as Gangabhavani (given below). Give group four, 20 minutes to reflect in their group on who among the people she encountered could be counted as part of the Jesus community
- First invite groups 1, 2 and 3 to enact their findings. After each role play ask the group,
  - How marginalised were the people Jesus included?
  - What accepted rule did He break in order to include?
  - How did Jesus role model his commandment to love God and neighbour as one loves God?
• Then get group 4 to share Gangabhavani’s story and their reflections. Invite the whole group to answer the following questions
  o What is Jesus’ call to us today?
  o Was this evident in Gangabhavani’s life?
  o How would we respond if we meet Gangabhavani today?
• Who Jesus includes into His community
• If Jesus were here in person today, He would be with the marginalised and excluded.

GANGABHAVANI’S EXPERIENCE

I am an Intersex person

My name was Suresh\(^2\), given by my parents, and I am the only son to my parents. I have one younger sister. I come from a poor family background. My father used to do small jobs and my mother is a house wife.

When I was in school in the 8\(^{th}\) standard, one day I was fell unconscious in the bathroom and this was reported by my class mates to the teacher. I have severe stomach pain and was bleeding from my posterior. The class teacher called my parents and sent me home. My father took me to the local physician but they were not able to diagnose my problem and referred me to a doctor in Bengaluru.

My father took me to Bengaluru to the endocrinologist who suggested some tests and scans of my body. After getting the scan results the doctor told me that I am an intersex person born with both male and female reproductive organs. I needed to decide first which gender I want to live as for the rest of my life; and the doctors will do a sex reassignment surgery accordingly. I had my inner feelings as a girl so I told the doctor to do the surgery to make me a woman. My father denied this, saying that I was born a boy and the whole family knows that I am a boy and that he had a son. Therefore, if I had the surgery and turned into a girl it would cause a loss of pride to the family especially to my father. He refused to allow the surgery and said that if I want to go ahead with the surgery that I would need to leave the house.

I left the house one day and began my new life begging at the railway station platform for 3 days. One day a Catholic nun approached me and asked me my story as to why I was spending my days on the railway platform. I told her all my story,

\(^2\) Original name not disclosed for confidentiality.
she said that I could go with her and she will help me with my surgery and also take care of my safety for the remainder of my life. I went with the Sister to New Delhi. She negotiated with different hospitals and make them understand my physiological problem as well as my economic problem as I could not afford the sex reassignment surgery. The surgery was done and the Sister took care of my post-surgery recovery for 8 months. When I was well, I told her that I will go back to my family, with a hope that they would accept me back as one of the family members as I was now a fully transformed girl.

When I went to my home my father told that if I come into the home, he would commit suicide. I was scared and left the home again and tried to spend my days in a temple. A police constable who is a regular visitor of that temple observed me and said I could stay with his family. He had two small children and his wife is a nurse. If I could take care of the children, I could stay with them. I agreed and stayed with that family. I kept in touch with the Sister, and kept praying to Jesus to change my life so I can have a better life.

I applied for B.Sc. in nursing in distance education and passed the exam. I came in contact with a few independent trans friends since I had left home the first time and during my gender change process. They helped me to apply for a central government job in Hyderabad. I was called for the interview and got selected. They also gave me quarters to live. My life has turned around.

**Reflections with St Isaac of Syria**

An elder was once asked, ‘what is a compassionate heart?’

He replied:

‘It is a heart on fire for the whole of creation, for humanity, for the birds, for the animals, for demons and for all that exists. At the recollection and at the sight of them such a person’s eyes overflow with tears owing to the vehemence of the compassion which grips his heart; as a result of his deep mercy his heart shrinks and cannot bear to hear or look on any injury or the slightest suffering of anything in creation.

‘This is why he constantly offers up prayer full of tears, even for the irrational animals and for the enemies of truth, even for those who harm him, so that they may be protected and find mercy.

‘He even prays for the reptiles as a result of the great compassion which is poured out beyond measure - after the likeness of God - in his heart.’
SECTION III

Exploring Gender and Sex

SESSION 5
GENDER OR SEX?

In this session participants will

- Learn about the difference between Sex and Gender.
- Discuss the difference between sexual orientation and gender identities
- Discuss gender identities and sexual orientation

60 minutes

Flip charts, pens, cellotape, slips of paper, black or white board, marker pens or chalk. One chart sheet on which SEX is written in large letters and another on which GENDER is written. Hand Out 4A.

- Divide participants into two groups. Invite one group to write down characteristics of an ‘ideal female’ and the second group to write down characteristics of an ‘ideal male’.
- Create two columns on a white board and name the columns, “Ideal Female” and “Ideal Male” respectively. Invite the first group to list their characteristics large enough for all to see under the “Ideal female” column. Invite the second group to do similarly under the “Ideal male column”.
- In between, if participants have not included this, casually add “gives birth” under ideal female and “beard” under ideal male.
- Read out the two lists for all participants to see and get their agreement whether this reflects their thinking.
- When they have agreed, exchange the headings. Make the first column Ideal male by erasing the “fe” (in the word female) and add “fe” to the second column (before the word ‘male’). Now read out the list asking them if it still fits for an ‘ideal female’ and ‘ideal male’.
• Encircle all the physical characteristics since they do not fit the headings any more.

• Point out that:
  - sex is the physical differences of being male or female; and
  - gender is the difference that imposes a social difference on being a male and a female.

• Encourage participants to share sentences that denote sex and other sentences that denote gender.

• Point out that one side of the room is marked with the chart sheet reading SEX and the opposite side is marked with the placard reading GENDER.

• Call out the following sentences and ask participants to move accordingly if they think it is a sentence that denotes sex or if it denotes gender.

  Call out the first sentence “Females are delicate and males are strong” Ask participants if this is a sex statement or a gender statement. Congratulate them if they move to the GENDER side. Reinforce that this difference is what society has created and that gender is the social difference of being male or female. Similarly, use the same process and call out the following four sentences:

  (The correct answer for the facilitators is marked in brackets)
  - Male voices crack in puberty while female voices remain the same. (SEX)
  - Females breast feed their babies while males bottle feed babies. (SEX)
  - Females must submit to their male spouses. (GENDER)
  - Males are the decision makers and females must listen (GENDER)

• Conclude that sex is the physical difference of being created male and female and gender is the social differences imposed by society based on our sex.

• Explain that at this point we are looking at a male and a female as binary categories.

• Then ask the participants to turn to hand out 4A and explain what sexual and gender diversity is about using The Genderbread person (Handout 4A)
**Key message to be communicated**

- Sex is the physical differences of being male and female.
- Gender is the social differences of being male and female.
- Human beings are not just binary i.e. male and female.
- Persons who are a diversity of orientation and identities have rights and are all created in God’s image.
HANDOUT 4 B

- Although the words **gender and sex** both give the sense of referring to 'the state of being male or female', they are typically used in slightly different ways: sex tends to refer to biological differences, while gender refers to cultural or social ones. Sex is assigned at birth but not gender.

- **Human sexuality** is the capacity of humans to have erotic experiences and responses and not necessarily the physical attraction between male and female. Sexuality is the ability to have physical, emotional, mental, spiritual attraction to another person. It need not be predominantly due to hormones. The major components of sexuality are: sensuality, intimacy, relationships, feelings, violence and gender/sexual identity.

- **Gender** is the range of characteristic pertaining to, and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity. Depending on the context, these characteristics may include biological sex (i.e. the state of being male, female or an intersex), sex-based social structures (including gender roles and other social roles), or gender identity.

- **Gender identity** is all about how one thinks about oneself. It's about how one internally interprets the chemistry that composes humans (e.g. hormone levels). It has been accepted that individuals form their gender identities around the age of three and that after that age; it is incredibly difficult to change. Formation of identity is affected by hormones and environment just as much as it is by biological sex. Oftentimes, problems arise when someone is assigned a gender based on their sex at birth, but that doesn’t align with how they come to identify themselves.

- **Gender expression**: how one demonstrates who one is.

- Gender expression is all about how one demonstrates gender through the ways they act, dress, behave, and interact—whether that is intentional or unintended. Gender expression is interpreted by others based on traditional gender norms (e.g. men wear pants; women wear dresses). Gender expression is something that often changes from day to day, outfit to outfit, and from one event or setting to another. It’s about how one expresses oneself, aligning with or doesn’t with traditional ways of gendered expression, and can be motivated by the individuals gender identity, sexuality, or something else completely (e.g. just for fun, or performance). Gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, and sexual orientation are independent of one another (i.e. they are not connected).
SESSION 6
UNDERSTANDING THE EXCLUDED

During this session participants will

- Share what it feels like to be excluded
- Discuss activities demonstrating “power over” as against “power with” for promoting inclusion in churches

60 minutes

Clothesline string, clips and slips of paper strung onto two sides of a room. A chart paper in which “POWER OVER” and another is which “POWER WITH” is written in large block letters.

Flipchart/chalk board or white board, markers/pens and cello tape

- Give out slips of paper and ask participants to write one or two words to describe how they have witnessed power shown by people in the church.
- Encourage them to clip their slips on a clothesline.
- Invite the group to a game. Assign all males the number 5. All females are assigned the number 2. All trans persons and intersex persons are assigned the number 1. Share with the participants the process for the game.
  1. Share with the participants the process for the game.
     - Facilitator will call a number (e.g. 16)
     - Participant are expected to group together to add up their value to form the number called, this means
       » a group of either two men and three women i.e. 5x2 + 2x3 = 16, or
       » a group of 16 people who are transmen or women i.e. 16x1 = 16, or
       » a group of 8 men (i.e. 8x2 = 16) or any other combination
     - Those that do not make the number called out are out of the game.
Call out 16, 15, 4, 26, 18. At the end of each call check whether the groups formed make the total. Send out of the game those that do not make the total called out.

Play till one or two are left.

Invite participants to share how they felt when

» people invited them to their group
» or when people excluded them from their group

Ask them if this happens in real life. Invite examples of when they felt excluded in real life.

• Invite participants to share why exclusion happens. When someone mentions ‘power’, compliment them.

• Connect their sharing to examples of exclusion from the Gospels. Invite participants to share how Jesus dealt with people who were excluded and marginalised.

• Explain that the Pharisees exerted “POWER OVER” while Jesus demonstrated “POWER WITH”

• Stick with cellotape on one side of the room, the chart paper with “POWER OVER” on it and “POWER WITH” on the other side of the room.

• Invite participants to take their slips and place it under what their interpretation was of their example of power.

• Invite them to reflect on the power dynamics in the church.

• Conclude that Inclusion was a key ingredient in the POWER WITH model that Jesus demonstrated to us.

• Gender inequality is based on power.

• Power is demonstrated as “power over” or “power with”

• “Power with” is Jesus’ modelling of power which gives respect, reaches out and includes.

• People who are LGBTIQA+ are marginalised and excluded. Respecting, reaching out and including is a call to the churches today.

Key message to be communicated
SESSION 7
WHAT IF I WERE YOU?

During this session participants will

- Describe labels given on sexual and gender diversity
- Listen to the sharing of a person who is from the LGBTQI community
- Discuss what they aspire for if they were from the LGBTQI community

60 minutes

A big cut out of the alphabet M, chalk, sheets of chart paper, pens and Handout 5B that is cut into strips along the columns.

- Greet participants and divide them into four groups. Make them stand in the form of a square. Ensure no participant is on the corners.
- Take the outline of an M (alternatively draw an artistic M on the floor in the centre) and place it in the centre of the room facing one line of participants.
- Ask each group to share what they see. One group would see an M while the group opposite them would see a W. The two groups on the other two sides would either see a 3 or an E. Encourage the group of M’s to insist that what is seen is only an M, playfully. Get all the groups to move their positions to the line that was on their right. Ask them now what they see.
- Conclude the game by saying that we all have our beliefs and truths. For years we have seen human beings as only male and female. Explain that there are many shades of being in between, neither male nor female.
- Explain that our attitudes related to people who are gender expansive remain discriminatory unless we can move to another’s perspective and empathise with them.
- Ask participants to sit in their four groups.
- Introduce the invited speaker who is from the LGBTQIA+ community, if there is no one in the group. Invite them to speak and share their life story/
testimony. If not possible, read out one of the life stories in this book.

- Ask participants to pick one of the cards on the table. (Cut outs from Handout 5B)
- Facilitate participants to write down on the reverse side of the card what the card means.
- Tell participants that they are reborn as the “word mentioned on the card”. Encourage them to close their eyes and imagine how it must feel to be that person.
- Read Isaiah “I have called you by your name, you are mine.” (Isaiah 43:1) and ask them to reflect on what it means to them to be formed as the person with the sexual and gender diversity card they have. Give time for silence.
- Ask the participants to open their eyes and write down their aspirations, wants and dreams on a sheet of paper.
- Get them to share this by placing their paper along a wall in a decorative way.
- Conclude by asking what the role of the church could be to promote all people living life to their fullest. (John 10:10)

- God calls each by name irrespective of our sexual and gender diversity.
- As Christians we must reach out and build an inclusive church irrespective of sexual and gender diversity.
**HANDOUT 5B**

Use Column one as cut outs for participants. Use the remainder two columns for facilitator reference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CUT OUT AS SLIPS</th>
<th>FACILITATOR COPY</th>
<th>MEANING IN BRIEF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRANS MALE</td>
<td>Trans male</td>
<td>A person who has a female sex identity or be born a female and yet define themselves as a man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRANSVESTITE</td>
<td>Transvestite</td>
<td>A transvestite is a man who likes to wear female clothes and adopt traditionally female characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRANSFEMALE</td>
<td>Trans female</td>
<td>A person who has a male sex identity or be born a male and yet define themselves as a woman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERSEX person</td>
<td>Intersex person</td>
<td>People are individuals born with any of several variations in sex characteristics including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals that, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, &quot;do not fit the typical definitions for male or female bodies&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BISEXUAL PERSON</td>
<td>Bisexual person</td>
<td>A person who is sexually attracted to both males and females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEXUAL PERSON</td>
<td>Asexual person</td>
<td>Asexual person is one who has a lack of sexual attraction to others, or low or absent interest in or desire for sexual activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NON-BINARY PERSON</td>
<td>Non-binary person</td>
<td>Also called gender queer persons it is a catch-all category for gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine—identities which are thus outside of the gender binary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HETERO SEXUAL PERSON</td>
<td>Hetero-sexual person</td>
<td>People attracted to the opposite sex. Someone who is heterosexual is commonly referred to as straight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUEER PERSON</td>
<td>Queer person</td>
<td>Queer is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual or cisgender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOMOSEXUAL PERSON</td>
<td>Homosexual person</td>
<td>A person who is sexually attracted to persons of similar sex is called a homosexual person. They can be gay or lesbian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LESBIAN</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Also called lesbian – a female who is sexually attracted to females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CISGENDER PERSON</td>
<td>Cisgender person</td>
<td>Cisgender, which describes persons whose gender identity or expression matches their assigned sex at birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN (MSM)</td>
<td>Men who have sex with men (MSM) Homosexual</td>
<td>This is a term that refers to the behaviour of men who have sex with other men, even when not necessarily attracted to them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**SESSION 8**

**DO NOT JUDGE!**

During this session participants will reflect on the Christian dictum “do not judge”.

60 minutes

The Bible, white/black board, marker pens/chalk

Worksheet

- Get participants to stand in a circle. Stand in the middle of the circle and read out James 4: 11 “Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge”.

- Ask participants to pray for the Holy Spirit’s wisdom and intercession and share answers to the following questions:
  - What does this text say about the Christian community and what is required of us?
  - It is for us to recognize just how judgmental we as Christians can be of each other; and in this context of transmen and women.
  - How do we create a new image of the community in Christ – what are the qualities we must look for and work towards?

- Read: Philippians 2: 5-11 “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore, God
exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father."

- Get participants to share what the texts mean while answering the following questions:
  
  o The text describes what in Christian theology calls the “doctrine of kenosis” (the ‘self-emptying’ of Jesus of his own will and becoming entirely receptive to God’s divine will, even to the Cross). In the context of us becoming a community of equals what does this experience of Christ teach us as we relate to those different from us?
  
  o How can we, with humility, relate to the servant leadership that Jesus demonstrated?
  
  o What is required of us to treat transmen and women as gifts to strengthen the community and not as threats?
  
  o Some suggest separate churches for LGBTQIA+ persons – will this fit with the Jesus example of welcoming all?

- Conclude with the key message.
  
  o Christ became a humble servant. He accepts us with all our faults. We as followers of Christ, privileged as we are to be children of God, must serve one another in love without any sense of privilege or judgement of others.
  
  o Paul exhorted his audience to have a kenotic mind. Christ existed and continues to exist as God.
SESSION 9
A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY – USING GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

In this session participants will

• Distinguish gender inclusive from stigmatising language.

• Share experiences and feelings when called in derogative ways.

60 minutes

Slips of paper label size, pins or clothes clips, marker pens, Handout6

• Ask for one volunteer in the group to read out the following sentence
  
  o “I was very disturbed as to why people will not understand my feelings - though I am feminine it doesn’t mean that I am available for sex all the time. This fact has been disturbing me.”

• Ask the volunteer to close his/her eyes and imagine what would have made this person feel this way. Invite the volunteer to also share what other feelings they have about themselves.

• As they share, write the main points on slips of paper and then clip it on the sleeves of shirt/dress of the volunteer.

• Call another volunteer. Read out the following sentence
  
  o “My mother blackmailed me saying that if I do not get married, she will consume poison and will die. I had to marry a man with whom I was hardly able to stay for 6 months. I became pregnant and gave birth to a boy child. After that I did not want to live with my husband came back to my mother and brother. My mother forced
me to go back to my husband. I said if she forces me, I will leave the house.”

- Ask the volunteer to close his/her eyes and imagine what would have made this person feel this way. Invite the volunteer to share what other feelings they have about themselves.

- As he/she shares, write the main points on slips of paper and clip them on to the sleeves of the shirt/dress of the volunteer.

- Get both volunteers to walk around among the participants to share how they feel. Explain that their feelings lead to their thoughts and actions that are disempowering, depressing and at times even suicidal.

- Introduce the concept that words used can be derogatory too. As a community of equals, we need to be aware of using language sensitively.

- Make participants sit in a circle. Tell them that for every 5th person, a phrase would be read out from Work Sheet 1. Ask them to attempt to change each sentence on that list into a gender inclusive sentence.

- Invite them to share their answers. Share the correct answers once they share their answers.

- Use gender inclusive language for promoting a community of equals.

- Inclusion empowers the church and disempowered communities.
WORKSHEET 1 USING GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Use Column 1 with participants. Encourage them to share gender inclusive language. Column 2 is the key for facilitators to use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.NO</th>
<th>COLUMN 1</th>
<th>COLUMN 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>She throws a ball and fights like a girl</td>
<td>She throws a ball and fights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>This is women’s work</td>
<td>This is everyone’s work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>Thank you, ladies, for this beautiful meal</td>
<td>Thank you for this meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>Men never listen</td>
<td>People never listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>He is in a homosexual relationship</td>
<td>He is in a gay relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>Fathers babysit their children</td>
<td>Fathers care for their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>See that the doctor takes his bag home</td>
<td>See that the doctors take their bags home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>They must have special rights</td>
<td>They must have equal rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>He had a sex change surgery</td>
<td>He transitioned/he had a sex-realignment surgery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>She is biologically female</td>
<td>She was assigned female at birth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>These trans men and women have the right to be.</td>
<td>Being a transperson is a right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>Hermaphrodite persons</td>
<td>Intersex persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>Intersex are trans persons</td>
<td>Intersex people are not trans persons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tips for using gender inclusive language

- Reverse the gender. Would it change the meaning of the sentence? Would it sound odd? Does it exclude others? If it does then it is not gender inclusive.
- Make the subject and object plural.
- Use a neutral pronoun (example ‘one’)
- Use an article (e.g. the, a) instead of a pronoun (his, her)
- Enjoy re-learning.

3 Adapted Kuruvilla Philip (Ed), “Christian Responses To The Issues Of Human Sexuality And Gender Diversity. NCCI, 2017 Page 178
SESSION 10
UNDERSTANDING GOD’S HEART FOR THE NON-BINARY CHILD

In this session participants will

- Participate in an experiential learning game to understand God’s heart for children
- Share Biblical texts to understand God’s heart for children who are non-binary

45 minutes

Flip charts, pens, blank paper (a half A4 size sheet for each participant), white or black board, chalk and marker pens.

- Give each participant a sheet of blank paper and ask them to create a handcraft (e.g. a boat, a house) using only the given paper, in five minutes time.
- After five minutes, invite each participant to share how they felt when creating their handicraft. Praise each one’s handiwork and display them where all participants can see them.
- Ask participants how they felt when they were given praise.
- Change your tone and say that you are disappointed in what they created. Tear or squeeze up their creations. Pause. Look at the participants and ask them to share their feelings now.
- Repeat their feelings of anger, feeling crushed, hurt, and hopeless.
- Sum up how they felt good when their creations were appreciated and praised and how they felt crushed and sad when their creations were destroyed.
- Ask participants for examples when they felt similarly in real life. Invite at least two examples (e.g. “I took time and made a vegetable dish but my children did not like its taste. I felt crushed”. “I was happy with my Science project work. My family was too. However, I
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got average scores for it. I felt sad”, “I painted a lovely birthday card for my mother. My brother accidentally crushed it a little. Both of us gave it to mom and she just kept it aside without praising us. We felt bad.”

• Reinforce what they created, for what purpose and how they felt when their creation was destroyed.

• Tell participants that you are now going to read a real-life story. Read Vinnu’s story (see below). At the end of the reading, divide participants into five groups and give each group one of the following questions to stimulate them to reflect on God’s love for children. Ask them to identify Biblical references for answering the questions below

  o Who created children? (God) Who created children who are non-binary? (God)

  o Did God know the child God created? (“I knew you before you were born” Jer. 1:5)

  o Did God have a purpose for every child who was created?

  o How does God feel when each of the children created non-binary are excluded, harmed, violated and abused like Vinnu was?

  o How can churches learn from the life experiences of people like Vinnu? What can churches do to enable people like Vinnu to live to their fullest God given potential?

• Give each group a chance to share their reflections.

Conclude with reminding the group of the key points.

• All children, irrespective of their sexual and gender diversity are created in God’s image, unique and precious

• God created children for a unique purpose and we must recognise their dignity and build their self-worth as God’s creations

• Child abuse, neglect and discrimination hamper God’s unique purpose for a child created by God as non-binary

• As a custodian for children, our supportive care and unconditional acceptance of who they are, can facilitate children to grow to their God given potential happily.
VINNU’S STORY

I am a boy not a girl.

Name given by my parents was Vimala but I never like it so I changed it to Vinnu. I am the first girl child born in my family and I have one younger brother. Because I am the elder one in my family, I used to take care all the needs of my family from childhood - like getting vegetables from the market, taking brother to school, and sometimes cooking food, when my mother was sick etc. From my childhood I liked all the “boy games” like cricket and football. Riding a two-wheeler was my favourite one. My father passed away when I was young and my family depended on the income of my mother. Meanwhile, I also started earning money doing some petty jobs. As my father had passed away there was a pressure on my mother from relatives saying I should get married because a girl child is always a burden in the family. I resisted saying that I never wanted to get married to a man. My mother blackmailed me saying that if I do not get married, she will consume poison and will die. I had to marry a man with whom I was hardly able to stay for 6 months. I became pregnant and gave birth to a boy child. After that I did not want to live with my husband and came back to my mother and brother. My mother forced me to go back to my husband. I said if she forces me, I will leave the house.

I said I wanted to divorce him and talked with my husband and am now divorced. I shifted to Hyderabad in order to avoid pressure from my mother. Initially I faced lot of problems in Hyderabad because I was still in women’s clothes. I have seen there is lot of freedom in the city to express your gender and sexuality. Hence, I started wearing men’s clothes and cut my hair short to look like a boy. Now I wear jeans and tee shirts and have a boy’s hairstyle. I enjoyed the look but faced problems when searching for a job. There were days in the city when I slept without having any food, just lived on water. Luckily, I met a queer woman who connected me with their group members. They all understood my position and offered me a job in various agencies but I said I want to start a restaurant because I can’t work under any man as his subordinate. Then with the partnership of a few queer women, I started a restaurant in Hyderabad. Within two years the restaurant has picked up - I started it to serve only breakfast but have now extended to serving meals too.

I went back to my mother and make her understand that I’m now living a life which I really wanted to from my childhood. She understood my feelings and my mother along with my son migrated to Hyderabad. Slowly my brother also migrated here and found a new job. Now we all stay together but I have my own room where I spend a few hours in the way I want to. I am also part of the Hyderabad queer collective and we run few events by mobilizing funds from queer people and allies. This is the place where I have been politicized about my gender identity that I come under ‘transman’ category. I live with a transwoman as a partner now. We are creating an independent trans family similar to a cis family where we all can share our joys and sorrows.

4 Original name not disclosed for confidentiality.
SESSION 11
PROMOTING CHILD SAFETY AND NURTURE

During this session participants will
• Share ways to support parents of children who are non-binary
• Discuss challenges and ways to overcome the challenges in being custodians and role models for children who are non-binary

60 minutes

Copies of Handout 6 and Work Sheet 2. 4 sheets of chartpaper, crayons or marker pens

• Divide participants into four groups. Give each a case study sheet (See Work Sheet 2), crayons and a chart. Ask them to discuss the case study and role play what they would do in that context.
• Call each group to role play what they would do. Use Handout 6 below to share inputs after each role play.

• Treat all children whether, male, female, or non-binary alike. Give them same tasks to do. Accept children as they are and practice inclusion at home.
• All people under the age of 18 years of age are defined as children. A child who is non-binary also has rights to life, development, protection and participation according to UNCRC. Parents have an important role in fulfilling these rights.
• The Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act, 2012 includes penetrative and non-penetrative sexual behaviours with children, including displaying pornography or private parts to children. Ways to protect children who are abused during the process of investigation and after care is also included. Abusers are mostly people who the child trusts. Parents can educate children to protect themselves and report any abuse that happens to the telephone help line No. 1098.
• All organisations, churches and homes working with
children need to have a robust Child Protection Policy which is implemented through having a child protection committee and Protection Boxes with active networking with child protection services.

- God chooses special parents to care for children who are non-binary. A church that supports and affirms Gods creation in children who are non-binary, are what children of God need.

**CASE STUDY – WORK SHEET 2**

(Cut the 4 case studies on this work sheet and give one to each of the four groups of participants)

1. **People were coming out of a church after service when they heard a baby cry. They followed the sound to a dustbin outside the church. The pastor picked up the baby. He noticed that he could not make out the sex of the baby. The sexual parts did not seem very clear. He knew many couples in his church who were praying for a baby. Role play what he does next.**

According to the Juvenile Justice Act (JJA) 2015, this baby is a “child in need of care and protection”. The pastor cannot take the child and give the baby to any parishioner. The pastor needs to either call the police or the child helpline 1098 and report. They will present the child in front of the Child Welfare committee who will decide next steps. The child may require medical support. The child will be placed in a children’s home or be given to a foster family for

2. **Kimmy and Simmi were girls who liked doing what boys do. They liked climbing trees. They get bullied by both boys and girls in their locality and church. They feel very sad about this. When they reach home, they tell their parents how the Sunday school children bullied them. Role play what you would do if you were their parents.**

3. **Karun is 14 years old. He lives in a Hamaam – a word used in some parts of India, derived from the Turkish word for bath-house, it refers to a home created by a group of trans persons for community living when they are forced to/decide to, leave their ancestral homes and birth families. His parents had given him up to them. He is made to beg at traffic street lights. He sells articles like pens that he is given. One day, Karun stole money from the neighbours. He gets caught. The police are called. As a church member, what would you do?**

4. **Manu is in the 9th standard. From his childhood, he feels more like a girl. His neighbours and family scold his parents to ensure he acts more like a boy. One day he tells his parents that he feels more like a female than male. As Manu’s parents what would you do?**

**HAND OUT 6**

1. **People were coming out of a church after service when they heard a baby cry. They followed the sound to a dustbin outside the church. The pastor picked up the baby. He noticed that he could not make out the sex of the baby. The sexual parts did not seem very clear. He knew many couples in his church who were praying for a baby. Role play what he does next.**
care till investigation is done by the police as to whose child it is. If the parents are found and they do not want the baby, there is a legal process for them to give up their baby and the baby will then be put for adoption according to the JJA Rules 2016. The pastor can share his testimony of how they cared for the child who is intersex, as a precious unique creation of God.

2. Kimmy and Simmi were girls who liked doing what boys do. They liked climbing trees. They get bullied by both boys and girls in their locality and church. They feel very sad about this. When they reach home, they tell their parents how the Sunday school children bullied them. Role play what you would do if you were their parents.

According to the United Nations Convention for the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) and several laws in our country e.g. Right to Education Act, bullying is banned. Child Abuse includes bullying too. There is a need to treat children as equals who have rights to protection according to our Constitution, JJA, 2015 and UNCRC. Moreover, every child is God’s unique creation made in God’s image. Promote education on diversity and inclusion in Sunday schools. If you were the parents you would proactively mentor the congregation and other parents on using positive discipline. The parents can report to the Pastor and encourage the church to have a child protection policy and programmes.

3. Karun is 10 years old. He lives in a Hamaam with trans persons. His parents had given him to them. He is made to beg at traffic street lights. He sells articles like pens that he is given. One day, Karun stole money from the neighbours. He gets caught. The police are called. As a church member, what would you do?

According to the police Karun is a “child in conflict with law”. According to JJA, 2015 Karun will be produced before the Juvenile Justice Board who in a child friendly way will see to his rehabilitation counselling, see if he is safer in the Special Children’s Home. The family may be referred for support from the government so as to prevent the children becoming malnourished.

4. Manu is in the 9th standard in a Christian school. From his childhood, he feels more like a girl. His neighbours and family scold his parents to ensure he acts more like a boy. One day he tells his parents that he feels more like a female than male. He also tells them that in the canteen a group of boys pulled his pants down and mocked him pointing to his privates. As Manu’s parents what would you do?

Since Manu is below 18 years of age, he is defined as a child according to the United Nations Child Rights Commission (UNCRC); the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) 2012; and JJA 2015. Manu may not understand what adolescence is. Children like Manu do not know that in adolescence they are undergoing changes in 5 dimensions of their lives simultaneously – namely, physical, social, intellectual, spiritual and emotional. It is important that parents accept what children like Manu says and to give them the space to be themselves. Encourage them to complete their studies and make choices about transitioning once they reach adulthood.

According to POCSO, 2012 (a law that protects children from sexual abuse), what Manu experienced when children pulled his pants down and mocked him was sexual abuse. The parents need to report it to the Child Helpline.
1098 or the nearest police station. The parents can report it to the Child Protection Committee that is mandated in every school. They need to report this to phone no. 1098 mandatorily. A suggestion could be made to the school to educate children on diversity and inclusion.

Parents need to support and stand by their children who are different from the mainstream. God gives special parents care of his creations who are non-binary. Hence to turn to support groups would be helpful too.
SESSION 12

POSITIVE PARENTING SKILLS AND ENVIRONMENTS

During this session participants will

• Play an experiential learning game that highlights that we can move forward to our goals no matter who we are

• Identify five-star relationships to support parents and children who are non-binary

• Share at least five positive parenting techniques

60 minutes

A five-rupee coin, black/white board with chalk/markers and pens

A4 size paper (one sheet per participant) and pens

• Divide participants into two or three groups of equal number. There should be at least 12 persons on each side. Tell them that they are going to play THE GENDER GAME.

• Ask them to stand in two lines and do the following.

  o Show the whole group Re.5/- coin and ask them to choose which side of the coin would be male which side and female (example the side with the Asoka is female and the side with the number 5 is male)

  o Ask each line to be connected by holding hands (like a telephone wire)

  o Give them these instructions:

    o Give them three minutes to plan their strategy for passing on the messages with a silent signal as they hand the coin from one to the other in their respective rows indicting the side/gender showed to them.

  o Only the first ones in each row will face towards the facilitator and will be shown the side he/she is placing on top. All the other participants in the line will face the opposite side – with their backs to the facilitator and will not be able to see this.
They are instructed not to look back or talk to anyone.

The person standing in front can pass on the message of which side of the coin he/she was shown to the person next in line through a silent message in the joined hands. (The group would have decided how the message will be communicated silently).

When the message reaches the last person of each row, they can immediately scream out which side (gender) was shown.

The group to get the correct side first gets a point.

- Play the game twice showing either heads or tails. Give them time to plan in between each game. When they are confident of their strategy and shouting out Male and Female give them a longer break for planning. Keep reminding them that they would be shown any side of the coin.

- After their planning, ask them all if they have planned well since it is the final game and you will be showing any side of the coin. Get their answers.

- Begin the final game. Show the edge of the coin - the coin is held vertically, (not heads or tails). Most often, none of the groups make plans for this side of the coin. The coin is treated as a circle with two faces rather than a cylinder with three sides. End the game after they struggle, or give wrong answers and show all participants what you showed.

- Discuss how even though opportunities were given for making plans knowing that any side of the coin is shown planning was made only for MALE AND FEMALE (heads or tails). Discuss how the other side was invisible and not noticed.

- Ask participants the following questions and listen to their answers and sharing.

  - How did you feel when you won any of the games?
  - How did you feel when you lost any of the games?
  - Does this happen in real life? Share examples.
  - In the game, who was important? (ALL)

- Connect their sharing to how male and female children are noticed and plans are made for them. Ask them to imagine how difficult it is for children who are neither noticed nor acknowledged. Children who are non-binary are neither acknowledged nor are plans made for them. Just like in the game all are important, so also in life all are important.

- Explain that is a reason for parent to be the key supporters of children who are non-binary. Parents can help them develop resilience. Explain that resilience is the capacity to bounce back after a challenge or after feeling sad.
• Share with participants the following actions to nurture their non-binary child like any other.
  
  o Demonstrate even more how much you wanted and love your child. Be actively involved with daily care of the child. Show the child by touch, keeping eye contact when speaking to the child, breast feeding, keeping the child warm and close to the body.
  
  o Expose the child to varying sights/colours, sounds, touch, tastes (after 6 months of age) and smells too. (For example, a child one month of age can be stimulated using a rattle placed one foot away from the face and moved side to side. A child below one year of age can be taken for a walk, where the child is encouraged to smell jasmine flowers, a dog barking is pointed out etc.)
  
  o Read story books with pictures, events to a 7-month-old child. Play peek-a-boo with a child above 6-7 months. Listen to music (even in pregnancy).
  
  o Keep child in a safe environment but allow the child to play on their own, and eat independently also.
  
  o Ensure that monthly health and weight checks and immunizations are given.
  
  o Use when-then to help children develop self-discipline. (e.g. when you put your toys away, then we can go for a walk; when you finish your homework, then we can play snakes and ladders.)
  
  o Set aside a special time daily for no-work related relationship building activities. Keep telling your children their strengths.
  
  o Encourage them to come out with creative ideas. Get them to share their feelings with you. Help them manage these feelings so that they do not harm self, others or things.
  
  o Conclude by telling them to parent the child the way they would every other child.

• Remind them that there may be extra medical care and community stigma. In order to cope, they need to identify five people in their lives who they can share their problems with nonjudgmentally.

• Only special people become parents of children who are non-binary.

• When a child realises, they are wanted and loved, they grow resilient. Parenting is about creating the environment and the space for children to grow feeling wanted and loved.

• All children irrespective of the sex or gender are important.
SECTION IV

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST - A COMMUNITY OF EQUALS

SESSION 13

A CONGREGATION Responds: Santa’s EXPERIENCE

In this session the participants will read about and discuss the experiences of a transwoman and the support and accompaniment she received from one congregation. It mirrors the image of the kind of leadership the church can take. It leads into the content purpose and outcomes of Sessions 14 and 15.

The facilitator will arrange for the Story of Santa given below is read out (for eg one person can read Santa’s account, another person the Church’s account)

SANTA’S STORY: EXPERIENCE WITH THE CHURCH

SANTA SPEAKING

I am Santa a trans person from Manipur who had been in acute gender dysphoria since I entered my puberty. There was not a single moment in my life that I was happy with my body. I always felt irritated when I saw my body and even sometimes contemplated either killing myself or of chopping off my penis. And the conflict between my body and sex assigned at birth frequently mocked me and led me to certain mental disturbances. Thus, I had started searching for a way to rid myself of the traumatic condition I lived in - the only option available was Gender Reassignment Surgery (GRS). The intention was in my mind for a long time however due to lack of knowledge and financial problems I could not make it happen.

In the passage of time, I had started developing networks and friendships nationally and internationally. Among all the people and networks which I knew and was familiar with, it was the National Council Churches of India (NCCI) that gave me the most support in the journey to my GRS. I had started engaging with NCCI for the last four or five through the Gender and Sexuality program under ESHA. I had travelled across different parts of North East India along with NCCI and had taken part in many programs as a resource person. I found the NCCI team to be very friendly. Apart from the official relationship, a feeling of kinship developed with members of NCCI, which encouraged me to express my deepest feelings to them.

In mid-2018 I decided to go to Pondicherry for the surgery. However, I didn’t have enough money for the entire process. After a long thought the only thing that came to my mind was to request people, friends and networks to donate money. I wrote a small note about me and shared it with friends. The money which was collected from the donations was not found to be enough to go for the surgery. I still needed some more money for my travel, accommodation and other requirements. I contacted the NCCI.
COMMENTARY FROM THE CHURCH

Fr. Thomas Ninan contacted the Rt. Rev. G. Raja Socrates, Bishop of the Arcot Lutheran Church (a member church of the NCCI and of the UELCI). The Bishop in turn, wrote to all the pastors in the church requesting their assistance. Transfiguration Church – a parish which is part of the ALC in Pondicherry responded positively. It’s present pastor for three years, Rev. G. Ebenezer, had taken the lead and encouraged the congregation to respond. Bishop Socrates had been the pastor of this congregation for many years and had nurtured the congregation to be a serving community – a tradition Rev. Ebenezer has continued very ably.

This congregation welcomed Santa; especially when she was going through this surgery - a sensitive phase of her life, because they saw it as a response to their calling as Christians and as the church. Rev. Ebenezar spoke of this congregation as being very open to care for the ones who need their help the most. The congregation, established 18 years ago, is composed largely of migrant Lutheran parishioners from all over Tamil Nadu – they are predominantly nurses and other staff from the many hospitals in Pondicherry.

A special collection for Santa was authorised by the pastorate committee - to which most of the congregants contributed and they gave her an initial grant. What she needed most was a safe and discrete place to stay. Mrs. Sheela Edward, a member of the Pastorate Committee and the Treasurer of the congregation, who runs a guest house, gave Shanta a room for two weeks, and with the help of her staff and some of Shanta’s friends from the trans community, she was nursed through the time before, during and in the post-operative recovery period.

SANTA CONTINUES HER NARRATION

On 24th June early morning, I reached Pondi and communicated with Fr. Ebenezer and Sheela Edward. They have told the auto driver the address of the place where I am going to stay. I had reached the place and I found a green gate, inside I saw the garden full of greenery (the coconut tree, neem tree, guava plant and flowers blooming). I thought I was lucky to stay in such a peaceful space. From the gate I called out to Akka (elder sister in Tamil) and a lady around the age of 55/60 came out to receive me.

Later in the afternoon, Sheela came to see me and she brought meals for me for three days. Aman was asked to drop me at the bus stand on the next morning and I caught bus that took me to the Mahatma Gandhi Medical College and Research Institute. I didn't feel the absence of my mother because of the care from Akka. She took me around on her scooty and introduced me to her family members. She was deeply concerned about me. One evening when she was busy with some other work, she sent her husband to drop my dinner in a tiffin. She always asked me my preference in food for morning, afternoon and evening and organized its delivery to me accordingly.

One afternoon a father from Chennai and Fr. Ebenezer came to see me and sat together with me for quite a long time. We talked about trans inclusion in the Arcot Lutheran Church in Pondi and I shared with them names of renowned trans individuals.

There was not a single moment that Akka left me. She used to ask me so many things in Tamil which I didn't understand but she tried her level best to make me
understand by using her hands in a kind of sign language. During my stay in the house Akka’s family was like my backbone.

The date for my surgery was second August. During the process I met Sheethal, a transactivist and Sameera a trans doctor working at the hospital. As I had travelled alone from Manipur there was no one to look after me. So, I asked Sheethal if she has any contact who can look after me during my stay in the hospital. She provided me Radha and Suzi who are her granddaughters, the worry I had inside me was resolved by their intense care and support.

During my stay at the hospital, I found a lady who is a relative of Akka who she had requested to take care of me. On 10th August I was discharged from the hospital and came back to the place given to me by the Arcot Lutheran Church for my recovery.

**Learnings and the way forward**

*The commitment of this community to follow Jesus’s way was inspiring. They engage in many ministries as a community. The pastor shared two texts – Lev. 20 and Rom. 12 – that help us recognise that God has separated us to “be holy”. To this community this translates as an invitation to service. We must constantly reflect through our actions, the uniqueness of Christ, they emphasised. This is a Church on whom the trans community can always depend!*  

Give 10 minutes to the group to share their reflections/reactions on this story of a transwoman and the church’s response in the group. The Congregation in Pondicherry had offered a form of Christian service that is commendable – it is an example of kind of leadership role churches must take in the accompaniment of transmen and women.
Session 14

EQUAL AND JUST COMMUNITY

In this session participants will:

- Share their reflections on our complicity in the exclusion of some in the community because they are different from us.

- To describe the essential qualifications of the Church as a community of equals that centres its existence on the life and message of Christ.

60 minutes

Sheets of paper with reflections about three sets of images from the Bible with basic questions as in Worksheet 3

- Divide participants into three groups. Give them Worksheet 3’ Get them to discuss as a group their Worksheet and select a rapporteur to share their discussions.

- Link their sharing to the church being a welcoming community of equals. Reinforce this after each group shares.

- Ask participants to demonstrate, for a few minutes, how they would be a welcoming community where all are equal.

- Very often some of us who have class and caste and gender power over others in the church community use our privilege to make invisible those who do not belong to our dominant caste, class or gender and exclude them from the life of the community of the church.

- Jesus calls for a new order of freedom in community – to renew the church into becoming communities of partnership and service. He calls for a “discipleship of equals” giving no space for excluding anyone because they are of a different gender, caste, class or sexuality.

- Jesus’ teachings are about the reinterpretation of the
law for the upbuilding of community. There are a good share of “do’s” and “don’ts” in Jesus’ teaching. However, his strictures were all related to community values – to the hurt we can cause to each other by breaking laws.

- Jesus seems to be calling us/the Church to play a new form of leadership in support of and with LGBTQIA+ communities.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Gal. 3:28
SESSION 15
AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH IS POSSIBLE!

In this session participants will

- Celebrate the different ways by which the church has promoted inclusion.
- Listen to real life stories of experiences.

60 minutes

- Sound systems and film projection logistics

- Invite a point-person from any of the organisations working in partnership with or through the NCCI; or a representative of the National Ecumenical Forum for Gender and Sexual Diversities to share their experiences in promoting inclusion.
- Refer to Hand Out 6 for more examples.
- Create 4 groups and ask each group to list out strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for their own churches in promoting inclusion of people with gender and sexual diversity.
- Invite them to share their discussions.
- Encourage one of the participants to say a prayer to intercede for guidance from the Holy Spirit to overcome the threats and weaknesses and use the opportunities and strengths.
- Thanking God for our strengths and opportunities to promote inclusion.
### HANDOUT 6
EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT STEPS TAKEN BY CHURCHES AND THEOLOGICAL COLLEGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>INCLUSION MODEL</th>
<th>CHURCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Awareness materials, seminars lead to the formation of a Department for Transgender Ministry for ministering, sharing and responding to the needs of Transgender people in their region.</td>
<td>• Arcot Lutheran Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Offer to educate transgender children in CNI schools and welcomed in churches</td>
<td>• Church of North India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Trans accompaniment: ministry among transmen, transwomen and children for health, sharing the gospel, membership, attending Diocesan Council as a voting delegate.</td>
<td>• Church of South India Madras diocese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Trans accompaniment: Integrating transwomen into the Women’s Fellowship.</td>
<td>• Church of South India Thuthukudi Nazareth diocese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Trans accompaniment: Marching along with the community in Pride parades.</td>
<td>• Church of South India South Kerala Diocese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Trans accompaniment: Producing music album through the Trans Resource Centre showcasing promising role models among the trans community who are working in varied fields, Income generation skills and networking.</td>
<td>• Church of South India Diaconate • Trans Resource Centre, Madurai, Kovai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Transgender re-integration programme: documentation, seminars, health care, Vocational training, Livelihood development, awareness and advocacy, helpline. Produced a film KARUNA portraying a positive image of trans people.</td>
<td>• The Marthoma Church-Navodaya Movement Mumbai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Set aside land for scaling up their work with trans persons.</td>
<td>• The Mar Thoma Church, Kerala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>The Metropolitan of the Diocese of Ahmedabad, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.</td>
<td>• The Orthodox Metropolitan of Gujarat (The Indian Orthodox/Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, CNI, CSI, The Salvation Army, Arcot Lutheran Church, Hindustani Covenant Church, Marthoma Syrian Church of Malabar, the North West India Council of Churches, Tamil Nadu Christian Council and the Kerala Council of Churches.</td>
<td>• The Indian Orthodox/Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church CNI/CSI • The Salvation Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>INCLUSION MODEL</td>
<td>CHURCH</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Giving statements that the church loves all people irrespective of their sexual orientation.</td>
<td>• Roman Catholic Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Providing housing for trans persons Income and livelihood generation</td>
<td>• Catholic congregation in Aluva, Kerala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Theological studies: Course syllabus, 2 credit hours, Optional Course on Human Sexuality, College examined: Theology cluster</td>
<td>• Senate of Serampore College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 14 | Theological studies: Promoting Inclusion and embracing diversity through Seminars, Consultations | • Senate of Serampore College  
• Aizawl Theological College, Mizoram  
• Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur  
• Bishop's College, Kolkata  
• Eastern Theological College, Jorhat Assam  
• The Gurukul Lutheran Theological College  
• John Robert’s Theological Seminary, Shillong  
• Karnataka Theological College, Mangalore  
• Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam  
• Tamilnadu Theological College, Madurai  
• Andhra Christian Theological College, Telengana  
• United Theological College, Bangalore  
• St. Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary, Nagpur |
| 15 | Theological studies: 2 credit course for M.Th. II students                        | • The Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, Chennai                                                                                     |
| 16 | Theological studies: Sermons and worship for seniors on the theme of Human Sexuality; 2 credits courses on Human Sexuality and Sexual Ethics at BD Final Year and at MTh level respectively | • United Theological College Bangalore                                                                                                  |
| 17 | Publication of Christian Responses to the Issues of Human Sexuality and Gender Diversity | • National Council of Churches in India, Nagpur                                                                                         |
| 18 | The NEFGSD Forum (The National Ecumenical Forum for Gender and Sexual Diversity) | • National Council of Churches in India, Nagpur                                                                                         |
SESSION 16
CHURCH AND SECULAR LAW - CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

During this session participants will

- Discuss IPC 377
- Learn about the schemes given by governments to trans men and women.

60 minutes

Handout 7, chart, marker pens, film show logistics

- Invite a speaker from the NEFGSD Forum to speak about their rights and discrimination faced (20 minutes)
- Divide participants in four groups. Ask them to Read Handout 7
- Then ask them as groups to brainstorm on what they as citizens and church goers/leaders can do to ensure that people with sexual and gender diversity enjoy their rights.
- Compliment them on their ideas.

- The Indian Constitution’s Article 15 commits to not discriminating people based on their sexual and gender identity or orientation
- IPC 377 decriminalises same sex consensual adult behaviour.
- There are schemes and programmes for social security of people who are trans male, female or child. The church can help connect them with the schemes.
**HANDOUT 7**

**LEGAL AND SOCIAL PROTECTION TIPS FOR PROMOTING INCLUSION.**

Enshrined in our Constitution is Article 15 that prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Children and people of sexual and gender diversity, therefore must not be discriminated based on their sexual orientation or identity. Few legal instruments and schemes that exist today in India are as follows:

**DECRIMINALISING IPC 377 that had criminalised what was termed “unnatural sex”**

After years of efforts to which many church communities contributed Section 377 is gone. However, are LGBTQIA+ people equal citizens under the Constitution and before the law?

They are, or should be, but

- Some landlords and housing societies will probably continue to refuse same-sex couples the right to live together.
- Some employers will continue to deny them employment or they face harassment in the work place.
- A man and a woman who may see each other for the first time on their wedding day get the right to inherit each other's inheritance if a will states this. But since same-sex marriages are still not legally recognised in India, even after living together, as a couple, for many years they do not have the right to inherit each other’s property.

LGBTQIA+ people are banned from openly serving in the Indian Armed Forces. In late December 2018, MP Jagdambika Pal (BJP) introduced a bill to the Indian Parliament to amend the *Army Act, 1950*, the *Navy Act, 1957* and the *Air Force Act, 1950* to allow LGBTQIA+ persons to serve in the Armed Forces.

**Schemes and services offered by different states for trans people in India**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>SCHEME</th>
<th>STATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 | Transgender Welfare Policy  
- Free sex re-assignment surgery (male to female)  
- Free housing  
- Citizenship documents  
- Admission to government colleges with full scholarship for higher studies  
- Alternative livelihood | Tamil Nadu, Kerala |
| 2 | Transgender Welfare Board with representation of trans persons. | Tamil Nadu |
| 3 | BPL benefits to Transgender persons | Odisha |
### Legal Protections: The Way Forward

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4  | - Raising awareness of transgender persons within all educational institutions in the state.  
    - Addressing issues of violence, abuse and discrimination against transgender persons.  
    - Established a monitoring committee designed with investigating reports of discrimination | Karnataka |
| 5  | - Will provide an amount of ₹1,500 per month to each transgender person above the age of 18 for social security pensions.  
    - Will construct special toilets in public places, like malls and cinema halls, for trans persons. | Andhra Pradesh |
| 6  | - Grant transgender men and women free life and medical insurance, and a monthly sustenance pension for those aged 60+ and registered with the Social Welfare Department.  
    - It is a requirement to establish medical boards to issue "transgender certificates" | Kashmir |
| 7  | - Provide reservation for trans persons in educational institutions.  
    - Court directed to frame social welfare programmes for the betterment of transgender people | Uttarakhand |
| 8  | - Set up a "Transgender Welfare Board" to conduct health programmes and provide formal education and employment opportunities to transgender persons.  
    - Provide skill development programmes to help transgender men and women to find jobs  
    - Free accommodation for those seeking scholarships  
    - An educational campaign was also established in order to sensitize the public | Maharashtra and Gujarat |
**SESSION 17**

**CREATING ACTION PLANS FOR PROMOTING INCLUSION**

During this session, participants will prepare Action Plans they will implement in their settings for promoting Inclusion in Churches.

**60 minutes**

**Template for making Action Plans, pens**

- Divide participants according to their constituencies or geographical regions.
- Summarise the key points covered from the first session till session 17.
- Invite them to sit in their groups and discuss and write out at least three activities they would do with their church goers or constituents. (Encourage them to draw inspiration from what is being done in other churches or by the governments)
- Invite them to share their plans.
- Encourage a leader to say a prayer where they pledge to change self to become more inclusive, not judge but connect with and empower the marginalised people with sexual and gender diversity.
- Invite an organiser to say a prayer about the church being a community of equals that models hospitality, respect and justice.
- Thank participants for being part of this transforming journey. Close the conference/workshop or meeting with a prayer.

- Participants go away with a commitment to the statement: “We are a church that follows in Jesus Christ’s footsteps.”

**Objectives**

**Time**

**Materials Needed**

**Process**

**Key message to be communicated**
REFERENCES


Appendix 1

An Ecumenical Document on Human Sexuality

National Council of Churches in India

[Adopted by the General Body of the National Council of Churches in India, on 24 Sept. 2011 for implementation (vide Res. No.21/GB/2011)]

Preamble: At the heart of Christian faith is the core spirituality which each Christian is called to follow: Love God and love your neighbour as yourself. Based on the foundational theological understanding that every human being is made in the image of God, we urge the Churches to review and affirm sexuality as a gift from God. While we celebrate this divine gift, we lament the loss of its sacred character in the way in which we perceive and practice sexuality, resulting in acts of sexual violence.

Therefore, we affirm:

1. Love in all its forms, ‘agape’, ‘philea’ and ‘eros’, is central to the Christian understanding of the divine and the consequent ordering of human communities.

   In essence, God is love. The Bible bears witness to this self-revealing God of love. It bears witness to a God who out of love reaches out to liberate creation. The New Testament suggests that the summary of God’s Law is love. Accordingly, the Christian vocation is to love God and to love the neighbour as one’s own self. The Christian faith tradition has understood love in three forms: ‘Agape’, ‘Philea’ and ‘Eros’.

   All these three forms of love are integrated and interrelated. In ‘agapeic’ love God gives God-self away for creation. In ‘phileal’ love God comes to dwell with us and befriends us. At the heart of this self-giving and befriending love of God is a desire within the life of God to know and to be known. This ‘erotic’ desire of God to know and be known makes ‘agape’ and ‘philea’ possible.

   As God reaches out to us to know us, we are invited to enter into the triune life of God by “knowing” God. This “knowing” in the New Testament tradition is an ‘erotic’ knowing. It arises out of our “restless” quest for our life with and in God. At the heart of all our human relationships is the desire to know and to be known. This desire which is a gift from God as a consequence of being created in the image of God makes all human relationships possible.

2. Sexuality is characteristic of our being created in the image of God and has the potential to facilitate our becoming in God.

   At the foundational core of Christian theological anthropology is the belief that we are all created in the image of God. As being counterparts of God, we reflect God’s longing and capacity to love. To be in the image of God, therefore, is to be in love as relational beings. Our desire to know and to be known by the other is characteristic of the love that binds human communities, a manifestation of which we see in the making of love in a covenantal relationship. This form of
love expressed in mutual respect, consensus and tender care enables us to grow in the bond of love thus facilitating the sanctifying process of our becoming into the likeness of Christ which is love.

3. Sexuality is essentially relational and has pluriform expressions.

Sexuality as an indispensable dimension of all human development and life is as complex and diverse as the human population, because each human being experiences and expresses sexuality in different ways. Sexuality is pluriform, ambiguous and fluid. Sexuality is essentially relational and involves human relations with the self, the other and the divine.

4. Sexuality can however be distorted.

Though human sexuality is an indispensable dimension of life, it can also be experienced and expressed in a distorted way. The beauty, sacredness and transcendence of materiality of human sexuality is distorted by unequal power relations, violence, objectification and commodification of the body and sexual reductionism instead of a liberative sexuality. This distorted concept of sexuality is underpinned by culture, theology and the judgmental moralizing of the church.

5. We need to re-read sexuality in scripture, tradition and liturgy

Readings of scripture, tradition and liturgy, with openness to sensuality, affirms sexuality. Scripture provides us with instances of deep love, sensuality and sexuality being expressed by biblical characters. The biblical vision of the future of the world is couched in a sensuous language of the union of the bride and the bridegroom.

Christian tradition in its mystic spirituality and the consequent aesthetic expressions; have embraced sexuality as a form of Christian love. Such awareness calls us to re-read the scripture and tradition to retrieve the sacred character of sexuality and its centrality in our spiritual pursuits.

5. The dichotomy between spirituality and physicality is blurred when sexuality is embraced within a horizon of human flourishing and covenantal love.

Our popular imagination of reality and the consequent spiritual practice is sometimes conceived in dualistic terms - of the dichotomy between the “spiritual” and the “material.” Such an unfortunate dichotomy could result in trivializing sexuality, or relegating sexuality as being base and hence profane. Such a dichotomy and the consequent distortion of sexuality can be overcome by embracing sexuality as a gift from God that is to be practiced with the recognition that it facilitates human flourishing and deepens covenantal love.

6. The Church has to be an inclusive and just community

A theological conversation on sexuality will further enable the church’s self-understanding and witness as a welcoming and affirming community, making space within which the human rights and dignity of all will be upheld.
APPENDIX 2

Facilitator’s Notes on Sexuality and Gender Diversities

These add-on notes are important for a facilitator to read as a preparation for the use of this module.

SEX:

1/2500 children are born with differences in their reproductive organs. They are known as children with atypical genitalia or intersex. It is the chromosomes that direct, through the production of hormones, the development of a baby in the womb down a male or female route. A diagnosis of an intersex condition is not just based on anatomy but is dependent on genetic, hormonal and other factors.

All humans are not born just male or female. God’s creation is diverse. Doctors try to work out what happened during the baby's development to determine the sex of an intersex child.

They check the baby's body's DNA containers, the chromosomes, to see whether the child is genetically female or male.

They see if the baby has ovaries or testes, and whether they have a womb or not.

They also test the hormones the body is producing and try to determine how the baby's genitals may develop.

Test results can be on a scale between male and female.

The sex is chosen as the one the doctors and the family believe that they will grow up to identify with best.

As children grow through puberty, they can develop characteristics of one sex more than another, different to the sex they were assigned to as a baby.

Several ethical dimensions are breached when faced with the fact that a foetus or baby is neither male nor female. The world has a deep-seated bias about sexuality and gender. When a child is born with indeterminate sex, parents and doctors do face a dilemma. Should they intervene immediately or wait till the child can make his or her own decision? Harmful non-evidence-based practices to “normalise” children are tried out. There are serious violations of the norms of informed consent. These are aspects the church has remained silent on unfortunately.

CREATED IN GOD’S IMAGE AND YET

“There are babies (intersex) are hidden from general society - and that was my experience of growing up.”

“I always had to keep it a big secret. I could not tell anybody I was having surgery down there, which we’re not supposed to talk about.”

“Everyone is dying to find out what sex the baby is; and how do you say we don’t really know yet.”

1. Compiled by Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, formerly Head of Community Health Department, Christian Medical Association of India, presently with the Christian Conference of Asia.
“I had one parent tell me she almost wished her child had cancer because at least people have heard of it, so when she needed support, she could say this is what my child has and people would know what it meant.”

“It’s the kid’s genitals, not the parents’ or the doctors’ and when they’re young adults they are going to want them to work.”

“It can be very confusing and isolating for families and what worries me the most is an early feeling of shame starts to develop, as this has to do with genitalia, and we don’t talk about that.”

Sex refers to physiological attributes that identify a person as male or female

- Type of genital organ (penis, testicles, vagina, womb, breasts)
- Type of predominant hormones circulating in the body (estrogen, testosterone)
- Ability to produce sperm or ova (eggs)
- Ability to give birth and breastfeed children
- A boy is one who has a penis and testicles. A girl is one who has a vagina and a clitoris. A child forms in the body of the woman, she gives birth to and breastfeeds the child.

Other than these few biological differences, girls and boys are not different. In fact, their bodies have more similarities than differences.

**GENDER**

Gender is the social difference of being a male, a female or the other. Society constructs differing roles, norms, behaviour, tasks, functions for males and females. Gender refers to widely shared ideas, perceptions, rules and expectations (norms) concerning women and men. These include ideas about ‘ideal’ feminine or female and masculine or male characteristics and commonly shared expectations about how women and men should behave in various situations. These ideas and expectations are learned from: family, friends, opinion leaders, religious and advertising industry and the media. They reflect and influence the different roles, social status, economic and political power of women and men in the society. This means that gender is the cultural or sociological differences between being male or female. Gender can be corrected/changed.

Gender is learnt from the time we grow. Religion and culture attribute certain social barriers and restrictions based on one’s sex. Gender is something that becomes part of life through the growing up process. It continues to be a requirement for social, legal, political, cultural and economic acceptance throughout a person’s life. Gender is also defined by one’s biological performance. For example, a child bearer becomes a care giver and the impregnator becomes the bread winner. Society links a biological female with gender roles to listen, to sacrifice, to be a caregiver. A biological male is seen as an ideal, if he is aggressive, a bread earner, the decision maker and the head of a family. Society does not give space for those that do not fit this binary of male and female. Any difference is hard to accept. A diverse gender expression (for example, a biological male who feels more like a female) has existed from time immemorial. Exclusion, marginalisation and disempowerment were built in socially to ensure hetero-normative patriarchal superiority. This male-female binary is fixed as normal. It was only very recently that the World Health Organisation declared that a person who is a trans female or a trans male does not have a mental disorder.

Gender is socially constructed, not biologically determined. The Church and even
Christian theology as well as societal structures have classically viewed gender and roles as part of God’s created order (often perceived as hierarchical), as biologically determined and universal. This has tragically justified abuse of power in relationships and has placed some at the bottom of the structure – open to discrimination; exclusion and even abuse. Social construction of gender is different from the biologically determined fact of sex. Gender is related to sexuality and sexual choices as well.

Gender-based inequality refers to situations in which women and those with gender diversity do not have the same access to information, decision-making power, household and community resources (such as land, money, nutrition) and social and health services or situations in which they are not treated respectfully because of their sex.

SEXUALITY

Sexuality is about more than acts of sex – it is about relationships in a community. Sexuality is what God created in each of us at our birth and is therefore laden with values, subjective to each person – experienced in different ways by each person. Being aware of individual differences is important in order to provide the environment for every person to feel that they are complete and are a welcomed part of the community. It is about ensuring the provision of effective services (medical, legal and communitarian), that respect each person’s sexuality and way of life (even if very different from our own). Ensuring effective legal and health provisions, that respect each person’s needs and choices, will ensure opportunities for a healthier and safer environment for all.

Sexual health is the ability to embrace and enjoy our sexuality throughout our lives. It is an important part of our physical and emotional health. Being sexually healthy means:

• Understanding that sexuality is a natural part of life and involves more than sexual behaviour.
• Recognizing and respecting the sexual rights we all share.
• Having access to sexual health information, education, and care.
• Making an effort to prevent unintended pregnancies and STIs and seek care and treatment when needed.
• Being able to experience sexual pleasure, satisfaction, and intimacy when desired
• Being able to communicate about sexual health with others including sexual partners and healthcare providers.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION:

Sexual orientation refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted. Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to men, women or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person’s sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviour and membership in a community of others who share those attractions. The terms ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’ are used to refer to people who experience attraction to members of the same sex, and the term ‘bisexual’ describes people who experience attraction to members of both sexes. Sexual orientation is distinct from other components of sex and gender, including biological sex (the anatomical, physiological and

2 http://www.ashasexualhealth.org/sexual-health/
3 American Psychological Association (2012). Guidelines for psychological practice with lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. Am. Psychol. 67 10–42. 10.1037/a0024659
Building Inclusive Churches: Engaging with Human Sexuality and Gender Identities

...genetic characteristics associated with being male or female), gender identity (the psychological sense of being male or female) and social gender role (the cultural norms that define feminine and masculine behaviour).

Sexual orientation is all about who one is attracted to physically, spiritually, and emotionally (specifically a sexual and romantic attraction). Labels tend to describe the relationships between the gender and the gender types one is attracted to. If a man is attracted to women, he is heterosexual or “straight”. If a man who is attracted to men as well one of another gender, he is bi-sexual. If a man is attracted to men, he is homosexual or gay. These are the labels most of us know the most about. We hear the most about it, it’s salient to our lives, and we can best understand where we stand with it.

Whether transgender, cisgender or intersex, the attitudes around sex being taboo, shameful and sinful; we nurture an inclination to ignore the health of sexual organs because of this inbuilt fear.

People with different sexual orientations and gender identities people face health care risks that are often not addressed because of lack of knowledge of the patient’s sexual orientation, ignorance of specific health care issues, or because the patient feels that the health care professional is homophobic or transphobic. Further they are excluded from educational, social and religious environments because of the stigma they face, including in the church.

• Sexuality is a natural part of life and involves more than sexual behaviour.
• Every individual’s sexual rights are respected.
• All persons have the right to sexual health information, education and health care.
• Every effort made to prevent unintended pregnancies and STIs with access to care and treatment when needed.
• Sexual pleasure, satisfaction and intimacy are available to all, in safe, trusting environments and relationships.
• Gender is socially constructed and not biologically determined.
• Every individual’s gender rights are respected.
• Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same

TRANS LIVES

The term transsexual refers to people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex. Often, transsexual people alter or wish to alter their bodies through hormones, surgery, and other means to make their bodies as congruent as possible with their gender identities. This process of transition through medical intervention is often referred to as sex or gender reassignment, but more recently is also referred to as gender affirmation. People who were assigned female, but identify and live as male and alter or wish to alter their bodies through medical intervention to more closely resemble their gender identity are known as transsexual men or transmen (also known as female-to-male or FTM). Conversely, people who were assigned male, but identify and live as female and alter or wish to alter their bodies through medical intervention to more closely resemble their gender identity are known as transsexual women or transwomen (also known as male-to-female or MTF). There are some individuals who transition from one gender to another prefers to be referred to as a man or a woman, rather than as a transgender.

Trans-sexuals and cross dressers are not the same. People who cross-dress wear
clothing that is traditionally or stereotypically worn by another gender in their culture. They vary in how completely they cross-dress, from one article of clothing to fully cross-dressing. Those who cross-dress are usually comfortable with their assigned sex and do not wish to change it. Cross-dressing is a form of gender expression and is not necessarily tied to erotic activity. Cross-dressing is not indicative of sexual orientation.

The diversity of transgender expression and experiences argues against any simple or unitary explanation. Many experts believe that biological factors such as genetic influences and prenatal hormone levels, early experiences, and experiences later in adolescence or adulthood may all contribute to the development of transgender identities.

Further, gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Sexual orientation refers to an individual’s enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person, whereas gender identity refers to one’s internal sense of being male, female, or something else. Transgender men and women may be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or asexual. Some recent research has shown that a change or a new exploration period in partner attraction may occur during the process of transition. However, transgender men and women usually remain as attached to loved ones after transition as they were before transition. Transgender people usually label their sexual orientation using their gender as a reference.

Trans men and women experience their transgender identity in a variety of ways and may become aware of their transgender identity at any age. Some can trace their transgender identities and feelings back to their earliest memories. They may have vague feelings of “not fitting in” with people of their assigned sex or specific wishes to be something other than their assigned sex. Others become aware of their transgender identities or begin to explore and experience gender-nonconforming attitudes and behaviours during adolescence or much later in life. Some embrace their transgender feelings, while others struggle with feelings of shame or confusion. Those who transition later in life may have struggled to fit in adequately as their assigned sex only to later face dissatisfaction with their lives. Some transgender people, transsexuals in particular, experience intense dissatisfaction with their sex assigned at birth, physical sex characteristics, or the gender role associated with that sex. These individuals often seek gender-affirming treatments.

Gender sensitivity refers to the ability to recognize the influence and impact of gender roles, gender bias and gender-based inequality on people’s daily life experiences, sexual and reproductive health, and programmes and projects that aim to improve the lives of women, men, girls and boys.

“Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels, and as a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.” (ECOSOC 1997/2)

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Appendix 3

Worship Resources and Bible Studies on Human Sexuality

Call to Worship

L: For all who have taken the risk of loving another,
C: we thank you, O God of Courage.
L: For all who integrate their sexuality and spirituality,
C: we praise you, O God of Life.
L: For all who have coloured outside the lines that society has placed around us,
C: we rejoice with you, O God of Creativity.
L: For all who have lived true to the inner voice within,
C: we celebrate with you, O God of Integrity.
L: For all who proclaim their pride at who you created them to be,
C: we dance with you, O God of Joy.
L: For all that you are in our lives, and all the gifts that you have given us, and
most especially, for the unique creation that is each one of us,
C: we honour you, O God of All.

Prayer

L: Wise and wonderful Creator of infinite variety,
forgive our petty striving to squeeze you
and your creation into our conventions.
Sophia, flower of richest and rarest beauty,
forgive our ignorance and prejudice
that has kept us from seeing your sacredness.
Though you have created us with wondrous diversity,
we have tried to restrict one another
into limited ways of being and doing,
and we are all the losers.
Forgive us and heal us of our racism,
heterosexism, sexism, classism,
and all the other evils that keep us
from appreciating your abundant, manifold creation.
Amen.

Inviting the Presence

One: Gathered in this sacred space, O Creator Spirit, in the multicolored company of Your
Church on earth and in heaven, We celebrate Your creation and invite Your presence into
our midst.

We know, Creator Spirit, that eternity cannot hold You,

Nor can our little words describe the breadth of Your faithfulness to us. Yet in the space of
our small heart and in silence, Come close and repair us.

(Silence)

One: Creator Spirit, bring new life

All: Where we are worn and tired,

One: New love

All: Where we have turned hard-hearted,
One: Forgiveness
All: Where we feel hurt and are wounded,
One: And the joy and freedom of Your holy presence All: Where we are prisoners of ourselves.
One: Creator Spirit,
All: In the space of our small heart and in silence, Come close that we may dream your dream.
(Silence)

Prayer of Confession
(Silently, and then aloud)
All: Loving God, we open our hearts in confession not because you need that but because we do. We need to be honest and to know ourselves as you know us; caring yet cautious, vulnerable and earnest, impassioned and somewhat imprudent, struggling and uncertain. We are complex beings, seeking to do what is right, but hesitant to risk what we have.
Forgive us, O God, our failures of love and trust. Help us to listen more carefully and fully to you. So mold us and use us, O God, that your mantle of discipleship becomes us. Amen.
Hear the prayers we offer this day for all your people. Heal the sick, raise the fallen, strengthen the fainthearted and enfold in your love the fearful and those who have no hope.
In the fullness of time complete your gracious work, overcoming fear, hate, stigma, and discrimination, healing every division. Reconcile all things and make them new, that we may be restored in your image, renewed in your love, and serve you as siblings in your kindom.
Amen.

Gracious and loving God, You sent Jesus to proclaim the good news of your salvation and to manifest your healing power. Continue your gracious work among us by the power of your Holy Spirit, and grant that we who have received your forgiveness and healing may live your gospel and manifest your kindom in all that we think and say and do, now and always.
One: Dear wondrously creative God, Thank you!
All: Thank you for the zesty gift of sexuality, for the juicy, sensory pleasures of life, For rich, imaginative fantasies as we live and move in your delicious world.
One: Be with us as we discern:
All: What is healthy? What is harmful? What is healing? What makes us whole? Bathe us in your healing balm.
One: O God of breath and flesh, hopes and dreams we long to follow you.
All: In deep, holy Mystery we put our hand in yours and ask you to lead us, one heartbeat at a time, as we dance in ecstatic wholeness.
Amen.
Blessing
May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
May the clarity of light be yours,
May the fluency of the ocean be yours
May the healing Spirit of this day be yours
May the accompaniment of the ancestors be yours And so may a slow wind work the power of love around you, A tenacious fire to fuel your life.

(ala Celtic Theologian, John O’Donohue)

The extracts of prayers here shared are from various meetings of the World Council of Churches – Reference Group on Human Sexuality Bossey

Contextual Bible Studies on Human Sexuality

A. Ha-adam’s recognition of a sexual partner  Genesis 2:18-24

1. Listen to Genesis 2:18-23. What is this text about?

2. Re-read Genesis 2:7 in as many different translations as you have in your small groups. How do your different translations translate this verse? Focus on the words used for the Hebrew ha-adam (‘the man’, ‘the human’, ‘the earth creature’, ‘Adam’ etc.)?

In Genesis 2:7 there is a play on words in the Hebrew: God creates an earth/ground creature (ha-adam) from the earth/ground (ha-adamah). So a good translation might be ‘earth-creature’ or ‘ground-creature’:

7 And Yahweh God formed ha-adam (the earth-creature) of dust from ha-adamah (the earth)
and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life
and ha-adam became a living being.

Do you think this translation is useful for your church and community?

3. Re-read Genesis 2:18-20 in your small groups, using this translation:

And Yahweh God said,

18 “It is not good for ha-adam to be alone;
I will make for it a companion corresponding to it”.

19 And Yahweh God formed from ha-adamah
every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens
and brought each to ha-adam to see what it would call each one.

20 And whatever ha-adam called each living being,
that was the name.
And ha-adam called the names of all domestic animals
and the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field.
But as for ha-adam, it did not find a companion corresponding to itself.

What is the relationship between verse 18 and verse 19?
Who decides what the animals names are?
Who also decides whether there is any among the animals that might be an appropriate partner?

1. Developed by Ujamaa Centre, School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Pietermaritzburg South Africa Website: ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za
4. Re-read Genesis 2:21-23 in your small groups, using this translation:

   21 And Yahweh God caused a deep sleep to fall upon ha-adam and, while it slept, took one of its ribs and closed up flesh at that spot.

   22 And Yahweh God built the rib which Yahweh God took from ha-adam into woman (ishshah) and brought her to ha-adam.

   23 And ha-adam said: This, finally, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. This shall be called woman (ishshah) because from man (ish) was taken this.

   What does God next do to find a partner for the earth-creature?

   Who decides that this new creature made from the body of the earth-creature is now the appropriate partner?

5. Re-read the whole text again, Genesis 2:18-23.

   There are two emphases in this story. First, there is an emphasis on the human ‘finding’ or recognising its appropriate partner. It is the human creature who recognises its partner, using poetry to say: “This at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh”. Second, there is an emphasis on the gender and sexual identity of the two creatures made from the one creature (ha-adam): a man (ish) and a woman (ishshah).

   Why have our churches made the second emphasis (the product) the main focus of the church’s theology on sexuality?

   What would change if our churches focussed on the first emphasis (the process), recognising that God gives us as humans the right to identity an appropriate sexual partner?

6. Read Genesis 2:24, using this translation:

   24 Therefore, a man (ish) leaves his father and this mother and cleaves to his woman (ishshah) and they become one flesh.

   Verse 24, which we have not yet read, suggests that the story has a third emphasis, an emphasis on sex. In biblical cultures it is the woman who would leave her family and move to the man’s family in marriage. But here it is the man who leaves his family!

   So the story is not about marriage, but about the power of love, sexuality, and sex. Such is the power of love, sexuality, and sex, the story seems to be saying, that a man might even leave his family in order to be with his chosen partner.

   How can we help our churches to take sexuality and sex seriously?

   How can we help our churches to understand that sexuality and sex is a God given gift?

   How can we help our churches to recognise that God grants us the right to identify our sexual partner?
B. Knowing scripture and the power of God Mark 12:18-34

1. Listen to a reading of Mark 12:18-27.

2. Who are the key characters in this text and what does the text tell us about them. What is the relationship between the characters?

3. Jesus says, twice (verses 24 and 27), that the Sadducees are ‘wrong’. What reasons does he give to explain to them why they are wrong?

4. While we know little about the Sadducees, scholars and Jewish religious leaders are in agreement that they represented the scripturally 'literalist' or theologically 'conservative' religious group within Judaism in the time of Jesus. They accepted only the written law, the Torah. They rejected the oral law which developed as a form of contextual interpretation of the Torah (the Talmud and Midrashim). As we see in this text, they did not believe in the resurrection, because it is not mentioned in the Torah. The main focus of their religious life were the rituals associated with the Jerusalem temple, which is why they confront and contend with Jesus. They understood that his presence was a threat both to their theology and their temple. And, in fact, the Sadducees disappeared from history after CE 70, after the destruction of the Second Temple (Herod’s Temple).

   What do you understand by a ‘literalist’ approach to scripture? What did a literalist approach to scripture prevent the Sadducees from ‘seeing’ and understanding?

5. What are some of the problems with a literalist approach to scripture?

6. Who are those in our contexts that use scripture to protect the traditional ways of their church and their own positions in the church?

7. Read the next section of Mark’s narrative, Mark 12:28-34. How is the engagement between this scribe and Jesus different from the engagement between the Sadducees and Jesus?

8. What is the understanding of scripture that Jesus and the scribe share?

9. How should we approach scripture as we engage with the issue of sexuality?
Appendix 4

Literature on biblical and theological resources on Human Sexuality and Gender Identities

• Althaus-Reid, Marcella, Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics (London: Routledge, 2000)
• Althaus-Reid, Marcella, The Queer God (London: Routledge, 2003)
• Amirtham, Metti, Women in India: Negotiating Body, Reclaiming Agency (Delhi: ISPCK, 2011)
• Brock, Rita Nakshima, Journeys By Heart. A Christology of the Erotic Power (New York: Crossroad, 1988)
• Butler, Judith, Undoing Gender (London: Routledge, 2004)
• Cahill, Lisa Sowle, Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)
• Cheng, Patrick S, From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ (New York: Seabury Books, 2012)
• De La Torres, Miguel A., A Lily among the Thorns: Imagining a New Christian Sexuality (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2007)
• Gross, Robert E and Mona West (eds.), Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2000)
• Gross, Robert E., Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002)
• Heyward, Carter, Staying Power: Reflections on Gender, Justice and Compassion (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1995)
• Isherwood, Lisa and Elizabeth Stuart, Introducing Body Theology (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1998)
• Lebacqz, Karen (ed.), *Sexuality: A Reader* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1999)
• Menon, Nivedita (ed.), *Sexualities* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2007)
• Zachariah, George (ed.), *Church and Homophobia* (Bangalore/Delhi: CISRS/ISPCK, 2014)

**NCCI Reviews and Publications on Sexuality and Gender Identity:**
• Rajkumar, Christopher. *Family and Human Sexuality: A Theological Reader.* (Nagpur, NCCI, 2016)
• National Council of Churches in India: NCC Review, VOL. CXXXIV,No. 06. July 2014
• National Council of Churches in India: NCC Review, VOL. CXXXVII, No.06. July, 2017
• National Council of Churches in India: NCC Review, VOL. CXXXVIII, No.06. July 2018

**Journals, E- Sources, Manuals:**
• Transforming Attitudes towards Sexuality: A Module for Asian Women. (Malaysia: AWRC, 2000).
## Appendix 5

### Useful Contacts for Church Accompaniment on Human Sexuality

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## Building Inclusive Churches: Engaging with Human Sexuality and Gender Identities

### Training Module for Churches

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<td>Kochi</td>
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Training Module for Churches

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