

Human Sexuality

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory... —John 1:14

In adopting, developing and maintaining the doctrine of incarnation, the church has affirmed the reality of the Word made flesh. Our spiritual lives are divinely linked with our physical lives—the two need not be separated. One of the implications of the incarnation is God's affirmation of the goodness of human life as God created it to be, including both our sexuality and our spirituality.

Sexuality is a gift from God; however it is also capable of misuse, injustice, exploitation, abuse and suffering. Our sexual socialization has many times been surrounded by misinformation, fear, and guilt. Now, more than ever before, there is a need to provide sexuality education to our children, youth and adults, in ways that will be life affirming, and perhaps life saving.

The United Church of Christ has encouraged churches to study human sexuality and has published life-spanning comprehensive resources for use not only in the faith community, but also in secular settings. These resources are age-appropriate, accurate and truthful, and have both immediate relevance and applicability for later life. In addition, they emphasize and underscore the values of love, mutuality, self worth, health, responsibility, justice and inclusivity.



Our Whole Lives—Sexuality and Our Faith

Our Whole Lives is a series of sexuality education programs for four age groups: grades K-1, grades 4-6, grades 7-9, grades 10-12, Young Adult (18-35) and Adult. Written by professional sexuality educators, the programs provide accurate information for parents, teachers and pastors to use with people of all ages to help them learn about sexuality in the affirming and supportive setting of our churches. The resources are based on the Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education produced by the National Guidelines Task Force, a group of leading health, education and sexuality professionals assembled by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States.

Each age level equips participants with accurate, age-appropriate information in six subject areas: human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health, and society and culture. It provides not only facts about anatomy and human development, but helps participants to clarify their values, build interpersonal skills and understand the social, emotional and spiritual aspects of sexuality.

There is a *Parent Guide* to Our Whole Lives Grades K-1 and Grades 4-6 that accompanies the Our Whole Lives resource for those age levels.

Sexuality and Our Faith, written by United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalist Association members, is the accompanying resource used for each group in the church setting. Each of the grade level resources has separate sections devoted to UCC and UUA faith traditions. By using *Sexuality and Our Faith*, leaders integrate worship, prayer and discussion of United Church of Christ faith values and principles into the programs for each age group.

The *Advocacy Manual for Sexuality Education, Health and Justice* is a resource that helps readers advocate for comprehensive sexuality education in their churches and communities.

Each level of *Our Whole Lives and Sexuality and Our Faith* offers:

- A well-designed, teacher-friendly leader's guide
- Trained leaders (Training of facilitators for all ages is necessary.)
- Parent orientation programs that engage parents in the sexuality education of their children up-to-date information and candid answers to all participants' questions
- Activities to help participants clarify values and improve decision-making skills Effective group-building to create a safe and supportive peer environment
- Education about sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment
- Opportunities to critique media messages about gender and sexuality
- Acceptance of diversity
- Encouragement to act for justice

Our Whole Lives and Sexuality and Our Faith, together with our adult program, *Created in God's Image: A Human Sexuality Education Program for Ministry and Mission* respond to General Synod actions calling for the development of sexuality education materials for all ages. Participating in a human sexuality program in a supportive and affirming environment in the church will help participants understand that sexuality is an important part of the way God created us; that their church cares about their sexual development; and that caring Christian adults are willing and able to talk with them about their questions and concerns.



Created in God's Image: A Human Sexuality Program for Ministry and Mission

Published in 1993, *Created in God's Image - A Human Sexuality Program for Ministry and Mission*, is a learning program written for adults. There are ten sessions designed to last two and a half hours each. The sessions begin and end in worship. The remainder of each session is devoted to individual and group learning activities that enable people to explore the theme in a safe and structured group setting.

Created in God's Image is an innovative program for members of local churches who wish to:

- explore biblical and theological understandings of sexuality
- find ways that congregations can more actively address sexuality issues through its ministry and mission
- explore in depth their own values, convictions, questions, and concerns about a variety of human sexuality issues
- gain greater clarity about the ethical decisions people face
- learn more about historical developments in the Christian tradition that have shaped the way we understand our bodies and our sexuality
- recover and celebrate a theology that affirms the human body and sexuality as good consider the cost of sexism to both men and women
- examine ways that the church can be a more inclusive community that offers healing, hope and compassion

Session themes

- Sexuality and the Life of the Church
- Embodiment
- Early Sexual Learning
- Moral Agency and Decision-Making
- Intimacy and Loneliness
- Male and Female Sexuality
- Identity, Wholeness and Health
- Personal and Corporate Crises of Sexual Violence Public Policy and Advocacy Concerns
- Where Do We Go From Here?

Quotes from program participants

"I now have a deeper understanding of the lives of my parents and my own life and I can be a more effective listener for my young adult daughters."

"These are issues people of faith should be talking about. The class discussions were very meaningful. There were disagreements but individual stances were respected."

"Actually the whole program made me aware of a lot of things about myself that will assist my future growth."

"This is a valuable program addressing an area that really does touch us all, and one in which the church should have a voice. The worship in each session was wonderful."

Ordering

For ordering, training and further information, please call the Minister for Sexuality Education and Justice, Ms. Ann L. Hanson, Justice and Witness Ministries, at 216.736.3718, or e-mail her at hansona@ucc.org

<http://www.ucc.org/justice/sexuality-education>