18 Ways to Make Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Members Feel Welcome in Your Congregation

By William and Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach and Synagogue Community

1. Develop a Shabbat service and sermon to educate and sensitize congregants about gay and lesbian issues. Consider having a panel of congregants at the oneg to discuss how GLBT issues affect their congregational and personal lives.

2. Phrase your congregational publicity in a way that is inviting to all people. Advertise your congregation's services and events in local GLBT publications.

3. When planning singles' activities, recognize that not all single congregants are looking for a partner of the opposite gender.

4. Appreciate that one who appears "single" may have a committed life partner of the same gender.

5. Design your membership and school forms to be welcoming to a spouse/partner of either gender1. Two men or two women living together may represent an established home or family.

6. In addition to "single" or "married," offer "committed relationship" as a membership category.

7. Be open in your community to sharing in the joy of same gender commitment and wedding ceremonies by encouraging couples to host an oneg Shabbat in their honor and include a mazel tov in your temple bulletin.

8. Publicize and celebrate the anniversaries of all committed couples.

9. Substitute “parent(s)/guardian(s)” on your religious school forms, for “mother and father.” Teach your students and congregants about the many models of diversity in Jewish families.

10. In all your congregational advertising, make sure that the GLBT population is specifically welcomed at all congregational events.

11. Honors belong to the entire congregational membership. Make sure that gays and lesbians are honored at services (i.e., opening the ark, reading a prayer or other passage, or lighting the Shabbat candles).

12. Acknowledge homosexual victims of the Holocaust at Yom Hashoah services.

13. Include gay and lesbian concerns related to employment rights and benefits, adoption, military service, health issues, etc. in the congregation’s social action agenda.

14. Make sure that gay/lesbian members are represented on all committees and are encouraged to participate fully in congregational leadership.

15. Offer a program for the parents and families of gays and lesbians draw them closer to your community, to increase understanding, support and awareness for them and to educate and sensitize your members.

16. Include specific GLBT content in your social, cultural, and educational programs, i.e, screen and discuss a film such as “Yossi and Jagger2” in your congregation’s Jewish film festival.

17. Comfort those who have lost a child, parent, friend or devoted life partner to AIDS and encourage them to mourn communally.

18. Create a list of community resources serving the gay/lesbian community3.

1 The Life-Cycle of Synagogue Membership, URJ Press

2 Search for “Yossi and Jagger”on www.Amazon.com

3 URJ Department of Jewish Family Concerns www.urj.org/jfc Kulanu, URJ Press

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