

Standing with LGBT people around the world

By [Janet Edwards](#)

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Today, 30 LGBT-affirming African religion scholars and faith leaders begin meeting in South Africa. The purpose of the consultation is to build an African faith foundation for the acceptance of LGBT people. It was organized by Kapyra Kaoma of Political Research Associates and Michael Adee of the Horizons Foundation's Global Faith and Justice Project. Kaoma is an Anglican priest from Zambia; Adee is an elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The PCUSA now officially stands with the LGBT people who are criminalized in 78 countries—including places where LGBT people are put to death, where police extort them and vigilantes stalk them, where even their family and friends are put at risk by laws against saying a good word about an LGBT person. The PCUSA's stance of solidarity with these people was adopted by unanimous consent at the General Assembly in June.

I was utterly stunned: for 40 years, every item related to LGBT people sent to the GA floor had led to fierce debate. This one did not. But this historic commitment was overshadowed in the headlines by other GA decisions, and it was lost among the distractions of summer.

Here's what it says: As a united church, we are now charged to pray for “our LGBT sisters and brothers,” to educate ourselves about this “critical global LGBT situation,” and to consider ways “to provide sanctuary, safety and support for LGBT refugees and asylum seekers.”

This statement isn't relevant only to Presbyterians, and it isn't just for people who support LGBT ordination or marriage. All Christians can join in this work of compassion for people suffering because of who they are. And every aspect of a local congregation can get involved.

Concern for LGBT people around the world can be woven into every Sunday service, highlighting the almost weekly news of their suffering. Hymns and litanies can be chosen that focus on caring for the stranger and the oppressed. Sermons can

include illustrations from their struggles.

In the PCUSA, our global mission agency has already worked on educational materials for our mission co-workers as they join with our international partners in concern about the LGBT people in their communities. These can be the foundation for teen and adult resources that educate us about this dire situation.

Congregations can join with local service organizations to offer the support refugees and asylum seekers need to make a home here. Temporary housing, language tutoring, building job-seeking skills, help finding a grocery store—these are all possible ways to offer sanctuary to those fleeing for their lives.

When it comes to accepting LGBT relationships, these cooperating congregations can come from various places on the spectrum. Surely we can all agree that LGBT people do not deserve to live in fear of prison or death. Compassion for these sufferers can be common ground in the midst of any differences we may have related to LGBT people.

We may feel that harsh judgment of LGBT people in the American church is petering out, that acceptance is growing. Shunning voices here may be less shrill than before, and church welcome of LGBT people may be taking greater hold among us.

At the same time, LGBT people being persecuted across the world are crying out—and their courageous outcry is opening our eyes to the immense influence continuing American judgment of LGBT people has abroad.

American Christians opposed to LGBT rights have spoken abroad to parish pastors, parliaments, and presidents. They have contributed to the passage of criminal legislation from the Caribbean to Africa to Eastern Europe and Russia. When LGBT people in some countries come out, they don't just face the challenge of building relationships with their loved ones and neighbors. They also bear the additional burden of a fierce and judgmental American Christian message that deeply influences both national leadership and regular folk.

Other American Christians have begun to offer a different hand to the world. The PCUSA is showing the way this gracious stance begins at home: We pray for those who are suffering, we educate ourselves about their situation, and we help those who find their way to our door.