

# GROWING Together

10th Anniversary Series

## HUMAN RIGHTS, SEXUAL ORIENTATION & FAITH

We usually speak of human rights in political terms. The language we use emerged at the end of the 1500s to articulate a widespread longing for economic security, freedom from abuse by authorities, and the right to participate in the political process. At the end of the 1700s, human rights were enshrined in the founding documents of the American and French revolutions. Since the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948, they have become a universal way of affirming human dignity.

Many Christians are unaware that human rights are also deeply rooted in the Bible.

**Gen. 1:26** “Then God said, ‘let us make human beings in our own image’.”

Christian faith affirms that the image of God is present in every single human being, regardless of any other factors. Not only is God’s image present but that image can never be destroyed. Any attempt to harm another human being through torture, humiliation or unjust discrimination, is therefore an assault against God.

The struggle to be free from oppression, to be treated fairly by those who make or enforce the rules, is an ancient one. Christians and Jews both look back to the same ancient struggle as a defining moment in their knowledge of God. The book of Exodus tells the story of Moses and Aaron confronting the Pharaoh and demanding freedom for the Israelites.

**Ex. 5:1** “Let my people go!”

The language of human rights is not opposed to the language of the Church but is an expression of it. The Christian Church has had to deal with human rights since its earliest days.

**Gal. 3:28** “There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female; for you are one person in Christ Jesus.”

For this reason human rights have been endorsed by churches around the world.

**“There is a growing awareness of the exalted dignity proper to the human person...whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable.”**  
(*Gaudium et Spes*, Documents of Vatican II, 1965)

The test of human rights for Christians is how the minority, the poor, the stranger, the outcast and for foreigner are treated.

**Matt. 25.40** “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Recently, people have become aware that gays and lesbians have been systematically discriminated against in their choice of housing, employment and other rights normally guaranteed by law. In many areas of our country, gays and lesbians are targeted for brutal assaults and murders. In all these cases, the very image of God is being assaulted.

Lesbian and gay persons are one of us. We work together. We pray together in church. We are each other’s neighbour. Some of us believe that homosexuality is not natural. Some of us say sexual orientation is a matter of biology. Some of us say it has to do with how we were raised. These debates are irrelevant for the issue of human rights. The image of God resides in every person and gives us dignity. Human rights are founded on this dignity and personhood. Christians are called by God to join others in protecting the rights of all persons.

**Mk 12:31** “The second commandment is this. ‘You must love your neighbour as yourself.’”

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### For reflection and discussion

- *In what ways are human rights being denied where you live?*
- *In your lifetime, how have your attitudes changed toward people who are gay and lesbian?*

### Further Resources:

“Human Rights and the Gospel: a call to partnership”, United Church of Canada

“Human Rights Principles Study Guide”, Anglican Church of Canada

“Churches and Human Rights” a special report” *Entre Nous*, April 1993, Canadian Council of Churches

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Saskatoon Centre for Ecumenism

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Saskatoon Centre for Ecumenism  
1006 Broadway Ave.  
Saskatoon, Sask. S7N 1B9  
(306) 653-1633