



**We are
Called**

TO HEAL. TO UNITE. TO JUSTICE.

Team Reflection - Huddle

LGBTQ Persons and Health Disparities

In the lifetime of many middle-aged and older LGBTQ individuals, their sexual orientation has been a crime and a disease. These legal and medical realities created experiences of shame and years of stigmatization that unite the distinct groups comprising the LGBTQ community. In 2011, the Institute of Medicine issued a report on LGBTQ health, describing how the population is referenced by this umbrella term—often in service of advocacy, social visibility, and research—even though each has separate and unique health needs [27.1]. While this population has gained greater visibility and civil protections in recent years, the LGBTQ population experiences various health disparities, and race/ethnicity, socioeconomic, geography and other factors compound their health challenges. 86% of LGBTQ students report experiencing harassment or assault at school nationwide. [27.2] The IOM Report found LGBTQ individuals to have similar and ongoing experiences of stigma, discrimination and violence across the life course.

A significant obstacle to the health of LGBTQ individuals is culturally sensitive care, as well as prejudice and bias, and these realities contribute to LGBTQ individuals less likely to seek preventative services. Other disparities arise with psychological health. Gay men are more likely to report suicidal ideation, plans and attempts across their lifetime. Commonly reported causes include prejudice events, expectations of rejection and discrimination, and internalized homophobia. Suicide attempts are four times greater for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth than that of heterosexual youth. Among adults, gays and lesbians have considered attempting suicide at twice the rate of their heterosexual peers, and that number is nearly 15-times higher for transgender individuals. [27.3]

For several years, Jesuit priest James Martin has toured the country facilitating dialogue and shared experiences of LGBTQ Catholics, their loved ones, parents, children, siblings, and friends. His message is simple and firmly grounded in the *imago Dei*—meaning all people bear the image and likeness of God. This necessarily includes LGBTQ individuals. Fr. Martin uses the image of a two-way bridge between church hierarchy and the LGBTQ community. He uplifts the LGBTQ community affirming that they are wonderfully made! [27.5]

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Consider

- What comes to mind for me when I think of the LGBTQ community? Do I see them as wonderfully made, and bearing the image and likeness of God?
- How does my hospital and health system let LGBTQ patients know they are welcomed and cared for with respect, compassion, and sensitivity?
- How might I contribute to creating a safe workplace for LGBTQ team members who may fear being bullied or rejected?

Let us pray together

Loving God,

Be with me when people make me feel “less than,”

and help me to respond the way you would want me to, with a love that respects the other, but also respects me.

Help me find friends who love me for who I am.

Help me, most of all, to be a loving person.

One more thing, God:

Help me remember that nothing is impossible with you,

that you have a way of making things better,

that you can find a way of love for me,

even if I can't see it right now.

Help me remember all these things in the heart you created, loving God.

Amen.

Adapted from “A Prayer for When I Feel Rejected,” by
Fr. James Martin, SJ, in Building a Bridge.

[27.1] The Institute of Medicine is now the National Academy of Medicine, and issued “The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People: Building a Foundation for Better Understanding.” The National Academies Press, 2011. <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/13128/the-health-of-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-people-building>. A subsequent report followed in 2020, “Understanding the Well-Being of LGBTQI+ Populations. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17226/25877>

[27.2] Gay & Lesbian Student Educator Network (GLSEN), 2019 National School Climate Survey Report. <https://www.glsen.org/research/2019-national-school-climate-survey>



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[27.3] American Psychiatric Association, Mental Health Facts for Gay Populations.

<https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/education/mental-health-facts>

Healthy People 2020. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-health>; See also the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Top Health Issues for LGBT Populations: Information and Resource Kit, March 2012.

<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/top-health-issues-lgbt-populations/sma12-4684>

[27.5] James Martin, SJ. *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity*. New York: HarperOne. 2017.