HOMOSEXUALITY

Program Target: To help young people be aware of and evaluate the different views on homosexuality in the Christian church today, and compare them to Biblical teachings.

What to do: Divide your group into four smaller groups and give each one space where they can read, talk, and discuss. Give each group one of the four "position papers" below. Introduce them by saying: Homosexuality is a controversial topic within the Christian church today. Christians hold sharply different views on it. Tonight we're going to explore four major viewpoints different Christians hold about Christianity.

Send the groups to their areas and give each group at least twenty minutes to explore and discuss the resources you have collected for them. Then bring the groups back together to discuss. Each group should inform the others about what they have learned about the point of view they researched. Their purpose is not to represent or defend that point of view, but just to present it for discussion. Lead the whole group in a discussion of all four viewpoints, exploring the questions they were given to discuss in their small groups.

Preparation Time: This activity does require a fair amount of preparation on your part in finding appropriate resources and in tailoring the activity to the needs and maturity level of your group. It's important to point out from the beginning that some of the viewpoints expressed in the resource materials are *not* those supported by the SDA church–although all are from various Christian churches or groups. Most Adventist would be most comfortable with positions 2 or 3. The views expressed in position 1 may be particularly offensive and need to be handled with caution, yet it is important for Christian youth to be aware of these views so that they can see the extent to which judging others will lead one away from Christ's call to love our brothers and sisters. Use the websites listed in "Resources" to begin your search for appropriate resources to help your youth explore these viewpoints. An alternative option, if you can meet in a school with Internet access in separate classrooms, is to give your youth the website addresses themselves and allow them to conduct their own searches. Because of the nature of the material, it is advisable to have an adult leader with each group as they research and discuss. As you deal with this material, remember that statistically it is probable that you have some youth in your group who are experiencing homosexual feelings even though no-one else may be aware of it. The suicide rate for gay and lesbian youth is estimated at 3 times the average for their age group because of feelings of isolation and rejection. Make sure that the message of God's love and concern for *all* people, and our need to respect everyone, comes across clearly in your presentation.

Resources:
Position One: Disturbing as it is, the "best" online site for this viewpoint is Fred Phelps' Westboro Baptist Church at www.godhatesfags.com . If nothing else, this site provides an excellent illustration of how "unChristian" hatred can make so-called Christians become.

Position Two: This view is best presented at www.exodusinternational.org . It's worth warning youth that despite the testimonials, some psychological research has suggested that organizations like Exodus can't back up the "success rates" they boast. Similar material is presented by Focus on the Family at www.lovewonout.com .

Position Three: This is most similar to the official Seventh-day Adventist church position on homosexuality, which you can find by searching under "Official Statements–Homosexuality" at www.adventist.org . Other evangelical churches hold similar positions (see for example the Southern Baptist position statement at www.sbc.net). It is also the position of the Catholic church (the easiest

place to find their official statement online is at: http://www.beliefnet.com/index/index_39402.html – there's a link to the church's position on homosexuality). Meanwhile, many "mainline" more liberal Protestant churches are moving more towards Position Four.

Position One: Homosexuals are evil, sick perverts who are trying to take over and corrupt our society with their loose morals. God hates them and all they do, and is punishing them by giving them AIDS. Homosexuality is abominable to God and homosexuals should be wiped out.
Explore the resource materials and discuss these questions:
1. What Biblical basis do these people have for their view?
2. How does it fit with your understanding of the Bible?
3. How do you think a gay man or lesbian woman would feel hearing these views expressed?

Position Four: This is well outlined at many websites: two that are a good starting place are www.soulforce.org and www.sdakinship.org (again, youth will need to be reminded that Kinship does not represent the views of the official SDA church, but it is valuable for them to be aware of all sides of the issue).

Position Two: Homosexuality is a sin. People choose to be gay, but if they give their lives to God, by His power they can be set free from homosexuality just like any other sin. Many "ex-homosexuals" can testify to God's power in changing their lives.
Explore the resource materials and discuss these questions:
1. What Biblical basis do these people have for their view?
2. How does it fit with your understanding of the Bible?
3. How do you think a gay man or lesbian woman would feel hearing these views expressed?

Position Three: Homosexuality is not God's plan for human relationships, but homosexuals are human beings and deserve our love and respect, because God loves and values them. There is a place in the church for homosexuals who live celibate lives, just like any other unmarried Christian is called to do.
Explore the resource materials and discuss these questions:
1. What Biblical basis do these people have for their view?
2. How does it fit with your understanding of the Bible?
3. How do you think a gay man or lesbian woman would feel hearing these views expressed?

Position Four: Homosexuality is natural and is a gift from God just like heterosexual marriage. Gay and lesbian couples who want to make a lifetime commitment to each other should be able to have their marriages blessed in church, and serve as leaders in the church.
Explore the resource materials and discuss these questions:
1. What Biblical basis do these people have for their view?
2. How does it fit with your understanding of the Bible?
3. How do you think a gay man or lesbian woman would feel hearing these views expressed?