

# **Polyamory & Christians**

## **How can Christian ministers and churches respond to polyamory?**

### **Do Christian ministers & churches need to learn about polyamory?**

Yes. Increasingly, new visitors who are openly polyamorous will arrive at Christian churches asking if they and their children are welcome. Also increasingly, Christian churches will discover polyamorous people already within their memberships, closeted, wondering how safe they are in their own faith community.

Polyamorous people sing next to you in Sunday services and in choir lofts. We serve on church committees and teach religious education. We attend denominational assemblies where many of us serve in a variety of roles in the service of our faith. Our faith is vital to us.

Polyamorous people have families. We raise children, cherish pets, and keep in touch with extended family. We have jobs, pay bills, carry out the trash. Our family structure may be a little different than most people expect, but otherwise, we are very similar to everybody else.

Christian ministers and churches need to prepare themselves to respond to these seekers, God's children, with the love and inclusion of Jesus Christ.

### **What is polyamory?**

Polyamory is the philosophy and practice of loving or relating intimately to more than one other person at a time, with honesty and integrity. Here we'll define "love" as an intimate, romantic, stable, affectionate bond which a person has with another person or group of people. This bond usually, though not necessarily always, involves sexual intimacy. Other terms often used for polyamory are responsible, ethical, or intentional multi-partnering.

Polyamory, often shortened to "poly," is a general term covering a wide variety of possible relationship styles, including group marriage (sometimes called "polyfidelity"), open marriage, expanded family, intimate network, tribe-building, and some kinds of intentional community. The essential feature of all these styles is the realization that it is possible to have multiple simultaneous love relationships in a context of openness, honesty, and integrity. Polyamory is a conscious, consensual, and deliberate decision for everyone involved.

### **How can Christian ministers and churches respond to polyamory?**

Jesus taught his followers to love their neighbors. In that same spirit, Christian ministers and churches can respond to individuals and families as people in need of a faith community, welcoming them without regard to the shape of their relationships and families.

### **Is polyamory a sin?**

God's priority for each of us is our own authentic relationship with the Holy. Questions about sin must be examined in the context of this foundation. Often, each individual must wrestle with these questions, just as Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord.

By focusing on the priorities of this authentic relationship with God and Jesus's commandment to love our neighbors, the many challenging questions of polyamory and faith will become approachable. Religious communities will have opportunities to create in-depth conversations with poly people among their own congregations – whether new visitors, or long-term members newly coming out.

### **Why do poly people have to talk about it?**

Why does any person have to talk about their spouse or fiancé at church? Why does anyone bring a person they are dating to Sunday services? Why does any couple celebrate a wedding at the altar? Like monogamous people, polys tend to experience their family lives, their personal relationships, and their religious faith as inextricably intertwined.

Each of us is created in God's image, one whole, indivisible person. A church should never require and cannot expect a person to carve out a part of themselves to leave at home while joining in worship.

### **What about children?**

The most important factor in the well-being of any child in any family is the love, care, and support of their parents or guardians. Across the United States and the world, many children are growing up happy and healthy in polyamorous families. Such children experience some unusual challenges and advantages in having more than two significant adults in their lives. In many ways, the experience can be similar to other close-knit extended family.

Discrimination by the larger community can burden children of poly families. By welcoming children of poly families into their faith community, churches faithfully follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not."

### **How do poly people feel about monogamy?**

Polyamorous ethical standards include respect for existing relationships and their boundaries, including monogamous relationships. Most polyamorists are happy for people who have found happiness in monogamous relationships. As Jesus taught Peter in the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of John, polys try to remember the need to attend to one's own life, without intervening in others' matters.

Polys object to compulsory monogamy imposed on them. Polys experience their love relationships as valid, mature, responsible, and sacred, and they find it unacceptable for monogamous people to claim those qualities only for monogamy. As polys see it, monogamy and the nuclear family represent only one in a broad spectrum of relationship structures in which people build their families.

### **Where can Christian counselors find resources?**

A resource designed for counselors is available on the Internet, entitled "What Psychology Professionals Should Know About Polyamory." A link is posted on UUPA's website, on the Contacts page.

### **What is UUPA?**

Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness (UUPA) is available to faith communities to provide support, promote education, and encourage spiritual wholeness regarding polyamory. A related e-mail list offers an opportunity for people with an interest in polyamory and religion to talk with each other. While UUPA primarily directs its work toward the Unitarian Universalist religious community, we welcome conversations with other churches, religious groups, and people of faith.

### **How can I learn more?**

For more information about polyamory and religion, contact UUPA at:

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