

However, other affirming groups on campus can be difficult to find. The Muslim Student Association and Hindu Youth for Unity, Virtues, and Action (YUVA) did not respond to requests for comments on this article, and many of the Christian groups that have positions on LGBTQ issues are not as inclusive as Hillel and the Buddhist Student Union.

Cornerstone is Carolina's chapter of Campus Crusade for Christ International. Cornerstone's website hosts links to the websites of Exodus International and Focus on the Family's "Love Won Out"; both programs encourage gay conversion therapy, a process that has been discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Medical Association. Cornerstone also hosts a link to the website of John Piper, a minister who claimed that God sent a tornado to damage a Lutheran church as a warning to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for voting to allow openly gay members to serve as clergy.

John Farmer, a campus staff member with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, characterized his group's theological position on homosexuality by saying it is "sinful" and "something that is not how God has created us." InterVarsity also believes any sexual activity outside of a marriage between a man and a woman is sinful.

To hold a leadership position in InterVarsity, students are required to agree with the organization's theological positions on a variety of issues, including the belief that homosexuality is sinful. Farmer confirmed that this requirement means an openly LGBTQ individual would not be able to be in leadership within the group.

"We as members of the greater evangelical church movement have historically done a poor job of relating to the LGBTQ community in the past, but we as InterVarsity sincerely desire to redeem that history in some small way through creating a welcoming and comfortable environment for LGBTQ students who are asking questions about the Bible, the Christian faith, and sexuality on UNC's campus," says Farmer.

However, Mr. Farmer also expressed doubt as to whether such a climate existed at this point in time.

Billy Kluttz, co-president of GLBTSA, shares that doubt.

"For me it's just such an atmosphere thing," says Kluttz. "I think a lot of people in the Christian community here are like 'Oh, well they just perceive it that way.' But I think it is the responsibility of people in that group to own what they have created."

Kluttz, a Christian and long-time member of the Methodist Church, has struggled to find a comfortable spiritual home on campus. When asked what his advice would be to LGBTQ students seeking a welcoming religious community, his suggestion is clear.

"Well, I would say first of all, come by my office hours, I'd love to talk with you. But also, start off-campus. I'm sorry, it's safer."

While it may be difficult to find an accepting Christian organization at UNC, it is not impossible. Anna Gribble, a UNC senior and active member of Lutheran Campus Ministries, describes the group as "open to anyone having a leadership role."

"Holy Trinity [Lutheran Church] and LCM have been true to the belief that everyone is welcome," says Gribble.

Holy Trinity, which sponsors LCM, recently joined a Lutheran effort known as Reconciling in Christ which aims to be actively affirming of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Gribble describes the climate of LCM as very open and welcoming to LGBTQ individuals. However, even the more accepting segments of Lutheranism have some ground to cover, particularly concerning marriage equality.

"They won't call it a marriage - not yet," says Gribble. "We're going to get there eventually. They call it a blessing of a union."

Acceptance of LGBTQ individuals by religious groups is a relatively new development, and the number of welcoming groups has grown significantly in the last decade. While there are still many campus organizations that wholly or partially marginalize LGBTQ students, the tide is turning toward an openness and affirmation of all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. ■

LGBTQ-welcoming churches in the area include: Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill Christian Church, The Chapel of the Cross, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Church of Reconciliation Presbyterian, and United Church of Chapel Hill. Chapel Hill Kehillah Synagogue, a Reconstructionist Jewish congregation, extends a specific welcome to "gay/lesbian families" on the front page of their website. For places of worship that do not openly express a position on LGBTQ issues, it is recommended sending an email first to ensure a welcoming atmosphere.