



THE GOSPEL OF EUREKA

A FILM BY MICHAEL PALMIERI & DONAL MOSHER

POV

THE GOSPEL OF EUREKA

Reconciling Civil Rights and Religious Freedom in a Changing Social Landscape

OVERVIEW

Love, faith and civil rights collide in Eureka Springs, Arkansas as evangelical Christians and drag queens step into the spotlight to reveal the human faces behind some of the most contentious political, religious, and cultural debates occurring across the country today.

Through their film, *Gospel of Eureka*, directors Michael Palmieri and Donal Mosher take the audience on a personal, moving, and often humorous journey through the past and present of this unique Arkansas town. Although the film documents the May 2015 election and the fate of city ordinance 22223 meant to protect LGBT people from discrimination (often misrepresented as a “bathroom bill”), the film’s true focus is exploring how this a small but complex community negotiates the shifting landscapes of religion, sexuality, and identity.

Learn more about *The Gospel of Eureka* and explore additional resources about the film and filmmakers at: <https://www.pbs.org/pov/america/>. POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining the [POV Community Network](#).

AUDIENCE

- Grades 9-12
- LGBTQIA+ Community Organizations
- Faith-based LGBTQIA+ Alliance and Outreach Programs
- High School Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) Groups
- College Gender Studies Programs

GLOSSARY

LGBTQ Definitions for Adults

(Adapted from “Welcoming Schools” by The Human Rights Campaign Foundation)

- **Ally:** A term that describes a person who speaks out or takes actions on behalf of someone else or for a group that they are not a part of.
- **Cisgender:** A term that describes a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.
- **Drag Queen/Drag King:** A man who dresses as a woman, typically as a performance. A woman who dresses as a man, typically as a performance. This is different from transgender (see definition below).
- **Gender:** A person’s internal sense of self as male, female, both or neither (gender identity), as well as one’s outward presentation and behaviors (gender expression). Gender norms vary among cultures and over time.
- **Gender Expression:** How a person expresses their gender through outward presentation and behavior. This includes, for example, a person’s name, clothing, hairstyle, body language and mannerisms.
- **Gender Identity:** An internal, deeply felt sense of being male, female, a blend of both or neither—how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One’s gender identity can be the same as or different from their sex assigned at birth.
- **Homophobia:** The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex or gender.
- **LGBTQ:** An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning. Additions to this acronym can include A, for “asexual” or “ally,” and I, for “intersex.”

- Sex: One's biological and physical attributes--external genitalia, sex chromosomes and internal reproductive structures--that are used to assign someone as male or female at birth.
- Sexual Orientation: Describes a person's emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Some examples of sexual orientations are gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual or pansexual.
- Transgender or Trans: An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth: A term used to describe people who identify as a different gender from the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation; transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.
- Transphobia: The fear or hatred of, or discomfort with, transgender people.

Source:

- "LGBTQ Definitions for Adults," *Welcoming Schools, The Human Rights Campaign Foundation*. Retrieved 22 Aug 2019
<http://www.welcomingschools.org/resources/definitions/definitions-for-adults/>

What is a Passion Play?

A Passion Play is a dramatic presentation depicting the trial, suffering, and death of Jesus of Nazareth as described in the liturgy of the Catholic church and later Protestant churches. Passion Plays rose to prominence in Medieval Europe and the most renowned performances would include hundreds of performers from diverse social classes. The popularity of Passion Plays waned during the Protestant Reformation but began to regain public interest in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Throughout the course of their history, Passion Plays have become associated with a rise in anti-Semitic attitudes and violence against Jewish people. Passion Plays often depicted Judas and the crowd of Jewish onlookers in racially stereotypical terms and in the extreme, as "Christ Killers". Since the Middle Ages, Jewish communities across Europe would avoid public streets during the Holy Week and when Passion Plays were being performed. Concerns about anti-Semitism in Passion Plays continued well into the late 20th century, so much so that the Catholic Church issued the "Criteria for the Evaluation of Dramatizations of the Passion," in 1988 which counseled against negative depictions of Jewish people in church productions.

Today, Passion Plays continue to be popular around the world, with large performances occurring annually from Canada to Poland to the Philippines to Australia and beyond. In the U.S., the longest running passion play has been performed in Union City, New Jersey, since 1915, and in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, "The Great Passion Play" has been seen by over 7.5 million people since 1968, making it the largest attended outdoor drama in U.S. history.

Sources:

- Dramatic Genre: Passion play," Encyclopaedia Britannica. Retrieved 22 Aug 2019 <https://www.britannica.com/art/Passion-play-dramatic-genre>
- "Passion play." New World Encyclopedia. 17 Jan 2019, Retrieved 22 Aug 2019 <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Passion_play&oldid=1017364>.
- "Anti-Semitism." New World Encyclopedia. 18 Apr 2018, Retrieved 23 Aug 2019 <<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Anti-Semitism&oldid=1010811>>.
- "Anti-Semitism, Globally Interfaith & Intergroup Relations: Passion Plays in History and Theology," Anti-Defamation League Retrieved 23 Aug 2019 <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/passion-plays-in-history-and-theology>

THINKING AHEAD

1. What is gender? When and where do we get our ideas about gender roles and identity?
2. What examples can you give of gender-based roles that differ from one culture to another? Why do you think rules and norms about gender identity are often strict and controversial within many cultural communities (countries, regions, religions, etc.) but vary across cultures? What does that suggest about the nature of gender?
3. What does it mean to be gender non-conforming? In a society designed to accommodate two genders, what day-to-day challenges do you think gender non-conforming and transgender individuals face?
4. What legal challenges do gender non-conforming and transgender people face across the U.S. and your own region?
5. Do legal protections and policies supporting transgender people qualify as Civil Rights? Why or why not?

ICEBREAKER:

1. Have participants break into pairs or small discussion groups and respond to the following question:
 - *What are some fundamental Civil Rights that are commonly accepted today but were highly controversial at some point in our history? (Discuss and list as many examples as your team can think of.)*
2. Have the pairs/groups shuffle and discuss their responses with their new partners using the following prompt:
 - *What arguments were used in opposition to protecting those Civil Rights?*
3. Reconvene the participants and have them share their discussion with the whole group. Record their responses to revisit later.

Discuss:

 - *How did religious communities and/or religious leaders participate in protecting these Civil Rights?*
 - *What roles have religious communities and leaders played in U.S. Civil Rights movements?*
4. Break into groups again and provide the following discussion prompts:
 - *Does the right to define and express one's own sexual orientation and/or gender qualify as a Civil Right? Why or why not?*
 - *What religious arguments have been made in support of and opposition to LGBTQIA+ rights?*
5. Reconvene the participants and have them share their discussion with the whole group. Record their responses again, and pose the question below to the participants. Invite them to share their responses with the group or have them write down their responses to revisit after screening the film:
 - *Some religious communities have argued that being required to abide by Civil Rights protections that conflict with their religious belief and doctrine is a violation of their First Amendment right to the free exercise of religion. Do you agree or disagree and why?*
 - *Is it possible to reconcile the conflicts between Civil Rights for LGBTQIA+ people and religious freedom? Why or why not?*

GOSPEL OF EUREKA: ACTIVE VIEWING

While watching the clips from, *The Gospel of Eureka* encourage the audience to think about the discussion on Civil Rights and religious freedom and ask them to note the

many ways the citizens of Eureka have navigated this conflict throughout its history and into the present day.

Clip 1 (5:25) God has no problem with me.

Several members of the Eureka community share personal stories about the intersection of sexual orientation and gender identity.

This clip starts at 08:40 mins with a church singer singing, "He speaks the sound and his voice is so sweet..." and ends at 14:05 mins with Jayme asking his daughter, "What if you had to pretend something about yourself so that people would like you? Wouldn't that be sad?" and his daughter responding, "Yeah."

Discussion prompts:

1. What personal experiences have Roxie, the Pastor, and Jayme had confronting the conflict between religious dogma and LGBTQIA+ rights?
2. How have each person's faith helped them reconcile that perceived conflict in their own lives?

Clip 2 (2:13) Eureka Springs Ordinance 2223

Members of the community argue for and against repealing Ordinance 2223 and the Narrator explains the link between this contemporary debate and the anti-gay campaigns of Anita Bryant.

This clip starts at 14:32 mins with at TV Anchor saying, "Ordinance 2223 caught a lot of heat when the city council passed it..." and ends at 16:45, with the Narrator explaining, "the campaign eventually faltered."

Clip 3 (8:10) Are we Judas or are we Christ?

Randal explains how Ordinance 2223 attacks the church's ability to regulate itself and Walter, Lee, and Kent talk about the significance of Christ of the Ozarks.

This clip starts at 18:23 mins with Randall saying, "It is complicated. I'm married with five children, I'm not gay," and ends at 26:33 mins with Felicia saying, "My ex-wife left me because I was prettier than she was."

Discussion prompts:

3. What surprised you most about the debate over Ordinance 2223?
4. How has Eureka's history laid the groundwork for this debate?
5. What arguments does the opposition give against the Ordinance? How do they try to reconcile this conflict with their fellow Eureka residents?

6. What does Randall mean when he says, "there are paragraphs hidden in the law that specifically attack the churches ability to regulate itself"? What do you think about his concerns for religious freedom?
7. Compare/contrast Randall's statement with Jayme's message, "My message is: you don't have the right as a Christian and as a Bible believer to take someone else's freedom."
8. What is Christ of the Ozarks and what does its history illustrate about the Eureka community past and present?

Clip 4 (7:39) Are we Judas or are we Christ?

Lee and Walter reflect on their life together and the election results are revealed.

This clip starts at 57:43 mins with the Narrator saying, "The Bible isn't the only holy book." and ends at 1:05:22 with Roxie in the audience of the Passion Play saying, "Even to the end of time."

Discussion prompts:

9. What does it mean to say that, "a photograph can be both a memorial and a prophecy."
10. Why do you think the filmmakers chose to cut from Lee's funeral back to Lee and Walter being interviewed? How did you feel when you watched that scene? What point were the filmmakers trying to make about Lee's religious faith and how he lived his life?
11. Civil rights Ordinance 2223 was upheld in the election by a strong margin of 2 to 1. Why is it significant that the town that hosts "The Great Passion Play" strongly supports Civil Rights protections for LGBTQIA+ residents and visitors?
12. If you were to share one thing you learned from watching ***The Gospel of Eureka*** what would it be?

GOING FURTHER

1. Do religious communities support LGBTQIA+ rights?

In the ongoing debate about LGBTQIA+ rights and protections, religion is usually represented in the media by religious leaders and communities who are campaigning in opposition, often with the stated goal of protecting 1st Amendment religious freedoms. Does that mean there are few or no LGBTQIA+ allies among religious communities?

Share *"Missing Voices: A study of religious voices in mainstream media,"* a joint project of GLAAD and the University of Missouri Center on Religion & the Professions. Have participants discuss the report's findings regarding the representation of religion and LGBTQIA+ issues presented in national media:

- *Why do you think media outlets consistently quote or interview oppositional sources from predominantly Evangelical organizations rather than Mainline Protestant, Catholic or Jewish sources whose messages on these subjects are largely positive toward LGBTQIA+ rights?*
- *Why does the media predominantly frame stories as "gay v. religion"? Who benefits from this bias?*
- *What could the media do to more accurately represent diverse religious attitudes related to LGBTQIA+ issues?*

Share GLAAD's "Media Reference Guide" and compare the participants' responses to the recommendations GLAAD provides to journalists who want to tell LGBTQ+ people's stories fairly and accurately.

Complete the activity by having participants identify and share "models" of reporting that they feel are most successful in their coverage of religion and LGBTQIA+ related issues. Using these examples, compile a list of qualities that are essential to accurate and effective reporting that can be used to better analyze future media representations of LGBTQIA+ issues and religion.

Resources:

- "Missing Voices: A study of religious voices in mainstream media," a joint project of GLAAD and the University of Missouri Center on Religion & the Professions
<https://www.glaad.org/publications/missingvoices>
- GLAAD Media Reference Guide - 10th Edition
<https://www.glaad.org/reference>

2. Welcoming Congregations: LGBTQIA+ Allies Across Faiths

Have participants name all the religious organizations they know of that expressly embrace and/or advocate in support of LGBTQIA+ rights.

- *How many were they able to name?*
- *Which religions were represented in their responses?*
- *What religions do they imagine are most and least welcoming to LGBTQIA+ individuals?*

Have participants research religious organizations in the U.S. who are LGBTQIA+ allies and compare their findings with their own list (see resources below) and discuss:

- o *In what ways (if any) do their findings challenge their own expectations?*

Complete the activity by having participants reach out to religious institutions and organizations in their own region and assess local attitudes toward and resources for LGBTQIA+ members of the community. Have them collect their research into an "LGBTQIA+ Resource List" that can be distributed through printouts and added to community websites.

Resources:

- "Missing Voices: A study of religious voices in mainstream media," a joint project of GLAAD and the University of Missouri Center on Religion & the Professions
<https://www.glaad.org/publications/missingvoices>
- Human Rights Campaign: Faith Positions on LGBTQIA+ Rights
<https://www.hrc.org/resources/faith-positions>
- GenderSpectrum.org: How to Find a Welcoming Faith Community for Your Family
<https://www.genderspectrum.org/blog/how-to-find-a-welcoming-faith-community-for-your-family/>
- The Institute for Welcoming Resources - A Program of the National LGBTQ Task Force
<http://www.welcomingresources.org/directory.htm>
- World Congress of GLBT Jews
www.glbtjews.org
- Gay & Lesbian Vaishnava Association
<https://www.galva108.org/about-galva-108>
- Shambhala Meditation Center: Queer Dharma
<https://ny.shambhala.org/queer-dharma/>
- Muslim Institute: Islam's LGBT allies
<https://musliminstitute.org/freethinking/gender/islams-lgbt-allies>
- Muslims for Progressive Values: LGBTQI Resources
<https://www.mpvusa.org/lgbtqi-resources>
- Muslim Youth Leadership Council (MyLC)
<https://advocatesforyouth.org/about/our-programs/muslim-youth-leadership-council-mylc/>
- PFLAG Faith Resources:
 - Atheists and Humanists
<https://pflag.org/athiesthumanist>

Christians and Catholics

<https://pflag.org/blog/faith-resources-christians-and-catholics>

Interfaith/Non-Denominational Communities

<https://pflag.org/nondenominational>

Jewish

<https://pflag.org/jewish>

Muslim

<https://pflag.org/resource/faith-resources-muslims>

Non-Judeo-Christian/Abrahamic Denominations

<https://pflag.org/blog/faith-resources-non-judeo-christianabrahamic-denominations>

3. Transgender Day to Day

For most people, activities like finding a bathroom when we need one, getting our drivers' license or ID card renewed, shopping for and trying on clothes, or just introducing ourselves to new people are mundane activities that may at times be mildly inconvenient or stressful but are rarely traumatizing or dangerous. For transgender people, getting through a typical day can present a range of unique challenges.

Have participants consider the barriers that transgender people confront across the U.S and in your community, including name changes on official government, safe and accessible restrooms and locker rooms, participation in gender-segregated athletics, and experiences with bullying and microaggressions. Have them also research how laws and public policy on the national and local level define opportunities and rights for transgender people in comparison with cis-gendered people.

When participants complete their research, have them work in small groups to identify key policy changes that need to be enacted on the local level to ensure that transgender members of their community have equal protections under the law. Reconvene the group to share and discuss their solutions and how they can act on the local level.

RESOURCES

The Film

POV: ***The Gospel of Eureka***

<https://www.pbs.org/pov/watch/gospelofeureka/>

The film's official **POV** site includes a discussion guide with additional activity ideas and resources.

The Gospel of Eureka: Official Film Website

<https://www.thegospelofeureka.com/>

The film's official website provides information on the film and filmmakers, as well as screening and event information.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php>

This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

GLAAD

<https://www.glaad.org/>

GLAAD works through entertainment, news, and digital media to share stories from the LGBTQ community that accelerate acceptance, and their website offers resources for journalists, producers, and audiences to help improve the quality, quantity, and accuracy of LGBTQIA+ representation in the media.

GLSEN

<https://www.glsen.org/>

Supports student and educator-led initiatives through national Days of Action, organizing resources, lesson plans, professional development, trainings, and guidance around forming and sustaining clubs and Gay Straight Alliances (GSA)

National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE)

<https://transequality.org/>

NCTE offers resources and guidance on transgender issues and rights for transgender people, their family/friends, and allies

Teaching Tolerance: Gender & Sexual Identity Resources

<https://www.tolerance.org/topics/gender-sexual-identity>

Provides resources for educators and students help shape inclusive school policies and empower vulnerable LGBTQIA+ students

Transgender Law Center (TLC)

<https://transgenderlawcenter.org/>

National trans-led organization advocating self-determination for all people and offering legal services and resources on a range of transgender issues

The Trevor Project

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

A national organization providing resources, guidance, crisis intervention, and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning youth.

Welcoming Schools

<http://www.welcomingschools.org/>

HRC Foundation's Welcoming Schools is a professional development program providing training and resources to elementary school educators to embrace family diversity, create LGBTQ and gender inclusive schools, prevent bias-based bullying, and support transgender and non-binary students

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Allison Milewski has developed media education resources for a range of award-winning filmmakers and national media organizations through her company [MediaForward Education](#), including PBS LearningMedia, Independent Television Services (ITVS), Latino Public Broadcasting, HBO Documentaries, and Tribeca Film Institute. She is also the founder of the international media education program, [PhotoForward.org](#).