

More Light Presbyterians Chapters
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) with answers
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Send questions about this document or about how MLP chapters work to: chapters@mlp.org

Learn more about More Light chapters at: www.mlp.org/chapters

Q: What is More Light Presbyterians? (MLP)

A: More Light Presbyterians is a nonprofit advocacy organization which works for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender equality and equal treatment within the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA). We're the oldest gay-rights organization working within the PCUSA - our origins go back to 1974, when our predecessor organization "Presbyterians for Lesbian & Gay Concerns" was founded by Rev. David Bailey Sindt.

Q: What is a More Light Presbyterians chapter?

A: An MLP chapter is a group of two or more people who want to work for LGBT equality within the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) under the national More Light umbrella, who commit to taking action each year to advance the More Light movement, and who sign on to the MLP chapter guidelines and support the formal mission of MLP. Becoming an MLP chapter is a good way to formalize your group's relationship with MLP -- it links you in an alliance with MLP's national network of chapters, it helps the MLP board of directors and staff to provide your group with support and assistance, and it creates communications channels that help you to tell the national More Light movement what you need.

Q: What are the overall benefits to becoming a More Light chapter?

A: When you become an official More Light chapter, your ability to support Presbyterian LGBT equality improves in a variety of ways:

- When you become a chapter, it strengthens MLP's ability to communicate with you.
- It strengthens your ability to communicate with the MLP board, staff, and the national More Light movement.
- It provides your group with access to resources, and to national and synod-level support, which is only available to MLP chapters.
- It officially links you to the national More Light movement, so that your group is recognized as one of many around the country working under the "More Light Presbyterians" name.

Q: Specifically, what happens when we become a More Light chapter?

A: A variety of wheels start to turn once your group is accepted as a More Light chapter and you pay the nominal chapter registration fee:

1. Leadership kit: In the mail, you'll receive a copy of the MLP chapter leadership kit, which includes:
 - A copy of the "More Light on..." series of informational documents, for you to use as photocopy masters.

- A copy of the first DVD volume of the MLP Hearts & Minds video series, including an interview with our field organizer Michael Adee.
- A copy of *The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-making*, from New Society Publishers. This book is a high-quality overview of how to facilitate small and mid-sized group meetings for progressive organizations.
- Additional printed resources that we continue to add over time.

2. Public recognition: your chapter gets listed in the "chapters" section of the MLP.org web site, and typically announced in our next regular MLPnews email news update.

3. Leadership email list: We'll add the leaders of your chapter to the MLPchapterLeaders moderated email list. This low-traffic list is solely for networking and the sharing of advice among chapter leaders, and the MLP staff and board of directors. It's a low-traffic email list which the More Light board can moderate to avoid off-topic posts.

4. Support from regional leadership. Over time, MLP plans to roll out a regional organizing plan of volunteer *Synod Coordinators*, trained volunteers who are available to offer advice, connections, insight, training, and materials to the MLP chapters within a synod. MLP Synod Coordinators act as additional sources of expert advice, supporting the work of the MLP board members and staff.

5. Using MLP's name: Your chapter receives the right to call itself a More Light Presbyterians chapter, and to publicly list your activities as organized by "the XYZ chapter of More Light Presbyterians".

Q: What's the difference between a More Light chapter and a More Light church?

A: A "More Light church" is a church whose session, the governing body, has passed an official resolution declaring the church to be "More Light" or similarly endorsing the mission statement of More Light Presbyterians. It can take months or years for a church to decide to declare itself "More Light". By contrast, an MLP chapter is a group of individual MLP supporters, not a church, and is easy to create. Chapters are organized, active groups of MLP supporters.

Q: Do I have to be at a More Light church to form an MLP chapter?

A: No. In fact, we encourage you to form a chapter no matter what church you're attending, or even if you're not associated with a church at all right now. Even if your church isn't an official "More Light church" and probably won't become one soon, you can form a chapter and have a More Light presence active within your church community and your Presbytery. Forming a chapter is a great way to bring positive activities in support of LGBT equality to your church.

Q: I attend a More Light church. Can the More Light supporters at my church form a chapter?

A: Yes. Any group of individual MLP supporters can create a chapter, and we encourage all MLP supporters who attend More Light churches to get together and form an official chapter. In

some cases, your More Light church might already have a "More Light committee" or "LGBT concerns committee" or a similar structure in place. In that case, that committee is probably the best group of people to become the chapter - there's no point in creating a separate group and holding separate meetings if you already have a group at your church that looks a lot like an MLP chapter. On the other hand, many More Light churches don't presently have active LGBT concerns committees - these churches may have declared themselves "More Light" over 10 years ago and then moved on to focus on other issues. If you're at a More Light church without an active group of people who meet to plan MLP-supportive activities, we encourage you to gather the More Light supporters together and form a chapter. One church that recently did this calls themselves the "More Light Action Team".

Q: We already have a group listed on the MLP web site as a chapter. How does the new approach to chapters work for chapters that existed prior to November 2004?

A: MLP has had groups listed on our web site as chapters for many years, and many of these groups are quite active and will remain so. Although MLP encourages all of these "legacy chapters" to sign up under the new (and improved) chapter system and its clarified guidelines, there is presently no requirement to do so. If you've had a functioning MLP chapter running for years, there's no requirement for you to turn in a chapter registration form to stay listed on the web site.

Q: What types of chapters are there?

A: MLP has two types of chapters: "standard chapters" and "branch chapters". The vast majority of groups will want to form a standard chapter, which works well for a group of MLP supporters that plans one or more low-cost or zero-cost MLP-related events each year. Standard chapters have no official status (and no filing requirements) with the IRS and don't collect chapter dues.

The "branch chapter" option is for large groups of MLP supporters who need official legal status as an organization, to allow the chapter to collect and hold chapter dues, open a bank account, and sign legal agreements as an organization. MLP branch chapters receive a formal 501c(3) federal non-profit designation as a More Light Presbyterians "subsidiary organization". MLP branch chapters don't need to file for non-profit status with the IRS since they're covered by MLP's non-profit status, however branch chapters do have to carefully track their contributions and send a financial report to MLP's treasurer each year.

NOTE: The "branch chapter" option is not yet offered by MLP because the board initially wants to concentrate on the creation of standard chapters. We expect to make the branch chapter structure available in mid-2005.

Q: What do I need to do to create a chapter?

A: It's easy. Just go to www.mlp.org/chapters, download and print a copy of the standard chapter agreement, choose two people to serve as the primary leadership and points-of-contact who will receive postal mailings from MLP, then sign the agreement and mail it in with your

chapter registration fee. You can also form a chapter online using the signup page at www.mlp.org/chapters. Once the MLP board has approved your request to become a chapter, we'll send you your chapter leadership kit and add you to our official chapter list.

If you don't have internet access, you can call our national field organizer office at 1-505-820-7082 and leave a message asking for a copy of the standard chapter agreement along with your name, postal address, phone number, and church affiliation if any. We'll send you a copy of the chapter agreement in the mail.

Q: What are the requirements for chapters?

A: The formal requirements are listed on the MLP chapter agreement that the chapter leadership signs and mails in to create the chapter. The basic requirements are:

- The chapter needs to subscribe to and support the mission of More Light Presbyterians.
- You agree to organize at least one MLP-supportive chapter activity each year.
- You need to keep us up to date on any leadership changes within your chapter.
- MLP strongly encourages chapters to work for visibility on LGBT issues within your local Presbytery.
- Chapters agree to a few guidelines designed to avoid confusion between your chapter's activities, More Light Presbyterians national activities, and the activities of other organizations.
- Standard chapters agree to pay an annual chapter fee of \$100, or to bring in two new MLP members during any given year. This chapter fee is waived for chapters associated with churches that already contribute to More Light Presbyterians.

Q: How can my chapter manage money? How do we fund the local projects that we want to do?

A: The question of how to appropriately work with money is an issue that any organized group of people supporting a common cause quickly encounters. For standard More Light chapters, there are two different ways to handle money:

1. Many chapters are set up as church committees or task forces at a supportive church. In most cases, when the church is supportive to the mission of More Light Presbyterians, church leadership will be happy to create a budget subcode within the church's accounting system to hold funds for the chapter. The church treats the MLP chapter as any other committee, with a small yearly budget used for projects. This is the easiest approach for most chapters, since it allows the chapter to use the procedures already in place at the church to hold money and write checks.

2. If your chapter isn't associated with a church at all, or isn't at a church that's willing to create a budget subcode for the chapter, then you can manage money on a project-by-project basis. With this approach, individual chapter members take the responsibility to pay for various parts of a project, then ask other members to chip in to defray costs for higher-cost items. For example, if a chapter decides to run a booth at a local gay pride festival, one person might pay the \$250 booth fee, then ask other members to help offset the costs.

Q: Can our More Light chapter do joint fundraisers with other organizations?

A: MLP strongly encourages chapters to organize fundraising activities on behalf of MLP, such as membership drives and house parties. In fact, we have some tutorials, such as the *More Light House Party Guide*, available to help you organize various types of easy fundraisers. However, putting together a multi-organization fundraiser often creates a multitude of organizational political, branding, workload-sharing, and messaging problems which are almost always better avoided. For this reason, any joint fundraising activities by chapters, in which both MLP's name and some other organization's name are both listed in association with the event, or where the funds raised are split between MLP and another organization, need to be approved in advance by the MLP board of directors. Typically if an MLP chapter does a fundraiser, it will be solely to benefit MLP, not for two or more organizations at once.

Q: What's the difference between More Light Presbyterians and other Presbyterian LGBT advocacy groups?

A: The answer to this question can depend to some extent on whom you ask. The authors of this FAQ see some differences in three areas: structure, strategy, and program.

Structurally, More Light Presbyterians is a single, unified, national organization. We have a single board of directors, drawn from Presbyterians in all regions of the country. We have one mission statement, one annual budget, and one set of employees to keep track of. This unity of mission, budget, and staff allows MLP and its chapters to act with unity at the national level, and it also avoids some of the problems that can occur if an organization allows the creation of sister organizations that use the same name but act without any central coordination. Legally, MLP is incorporated as a 501c(3) non-profit organization - we aren't run as a project of a church or as a subcode of somebody else's larger budget, so we're accountable only to you, our members and contributors.

Strategically, MLP has traditionally stressed the importance of education, training, and empowerment of our grass roots supporters. That's why we find the idea of "More Light churches" and "More Light chapters" so important. The More Light movement for LGBT equality in the Presbyterian Church isn't about the MLP board of directors and staff -- it's about you, and about the changes in Presbyterian hearts & minds that you can make happen if you've got access to the right tools, educational materials, training, and advice.

Strategically, More Light Presbyterians is also on record as always favoring the submission of a "delete-B" overture, to remove the anti-gay G6.0106b from the Presbyterian Book of Order, at every Presbyterian general assembly. Not all Presbyterian LGBT advocacy organizations can make this claim -- at least one organization has taken what might be referred to as a more "gradualist" approach of opposing delete-B overtures some years, and endorsing delete-B overtures in other years. MLP, by contrast, is active at every single General Assembly working to get a delete-B overture, and other critical overtures of importance to the LGBT community, passed through committees and from the floor of General Assembly.

Programmatically, MLP places a strong emphasis on educational materials, pastoral concern for LGBT people in the denomination, and the nuts and bolts of passing pro-LGBT Presbyterian legislation both at the national and Presbytery levels. We want to make sure that you, the supporters of the More Light movement, have the educational tools and the training that we all need to collectively bring about change. Nationally, MLP organizes several "grass-roots national" events each year -- these are opportunities for all of our chapters, churches, and members to take some sort of unified action on the same day. One example of a grass-roots national event is More Light Sunday, first held in June 2004, in which More Light churches around the country affirmed their solidarity with, and the importance of, the More Light movement for LGBT equality.

The MLP model of a unified national organization, with chapters that have a lot of local flexibility but still agree to some basic ground rules, makes MLP very Presbyterian in its organizing style. Just as individual Presbyterian churches have a great deal of flexibility in their activities but agree to follow basic guidelines set nationally, similarly More Light Presbyterians chapters have flexibility but also agree to follow some basic guidelines.

Q: Can my chapter hire staff?

A: In keeping with the MLP model of being a unified national organization with a national network of supportive churches, individuals, and chapters, MLP asks its chapters to stay volunteer-based and asks that chapters not hire their own staff members. Experience suggests that quite often, when a local chapter of a national nonprofit organization hires its own local staff member, the volunteers in that chapter immediately have to shift their energies away from working on the pro-LGBT projects that interest them, and instead must focus almost entirely on fundraising to pay the employee's salary. Continuous, year-in year-out fundraising is a non-trivial, grueling, and often thankless task which most grass-roots supporters have neither the interest, nor the energy to sustain. MLP doesn't want you to burn out doing fundraising -- rather, we want to help you to find exciting ways to win hearts, minds, and votes for LGBT equality within the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.

Thanks for reading this FAQ! You can find more information about More Light Presbyterians chapters at www.mlp.org/chapters.