

NEW SPIRITS



An intimate look at sexual orientation and
gender identity in one American church

New Spirits

Directors: Andrew Freer and Samuel Díaz-Littauer

Producer/Editor: Andrew Freer

Associate Producers: Claire Harrier and Lars Hayne

Camera Operators: Andrew Freer, Samuel Díaz-Littauer, Claire Harrier,
and Lars Hayne

Music: Jason Cress Graphic Design: Kyle Fletcher

(USA, October 2010, 79 minutes)

www.newspirits.net

Contact: Andrew Freer

Phone: 419-709-3707

Email: Andrew@heavehproductions.com

Address: 193 N. Marion St., Apt. 2
Oak Park, IL 60301



HEAVE-HO PRODUCTIONS
INFO@HEAVEHPRODUCTIONS.COM
CHICAGO, IL

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Logline

New Spirits is a documentary that takes an intimate look at sexual orientation and gender identity in one American church.

Synopsis

The issue of homosexuality in the United States will arguably go down as one of the most incendiary subjects of the early 21st century. Not only has it divided countless families, but some claim it threatens to tear the seams of the traditional family, the army, and the Christian church, leaving few unscathed or emotionally uninvolved. Though the subject is one that has been scrutinized relentlessly, it has all too often been treated with an imbalanced ideological lens, moving the real protagonists to the margins of the discussion.

New Spirits tells the story of a religious community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered members seeking to find purpose and identity amidst changing times. The film is an intimate one-year look into the life and faith of many of the members of New Spirit Community Church as they enjoy time together, pray with each other, take diverging paths, and experience a sudden tragedy. Through the events that unfold in the film, the audience is allowed a rare glimpse into the lives of people within the LGBTQ community that live as the rest of humanity does—with the candor and desire to make meaning out of everyday life. A film without voice-over narration, *New Spirits* attempts to give full credence to the story of those individuals within this church community as they themselves tell it.

Included are interviews with Dr. Tony Campolo, Dr. Marilyn McCord Adams, Former U.S. Representative Jim Kolbe, and others.



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Directors' Statement

We happened to walk into New Spirit Community Church one Sunday morning while visiting local churches. What we found there was a small community of people trying to connect with God and with each other, infused with a fresh authenticity about their faith, sexual orientation, and gender identity that we had seldom encountered before. To experience a church like this, we believed, could help challenge and re-conceive traditions and ideas that the mainstream Christian church had about faith, belief, and sexuality.

Even so, when we began filming *New Spirits* in the spring of 2008, we had little idea what would come out as a result. We understood from our own educational experiences within the conservative bastions of Christianity that many Christians needed greater exposure to the wider LGBTQ community. Most of the time there had been little to none. Our initial goal, then, was to show the inner life and workings of New Spirit Community Church in order to expose people to a paradigm that they may never have encountered before. We thought a film that celebrated the human element of a broader issue would help to dismantle the polarizing effect it often had on people.

Filming lasted a little over a year. Over the course of this time, membership struggles, health issues, unanswered theological questions, and a sudden tragedy in the community created a tone that we had not originally expected. We were forced to reconcile our idea that even though New Spirit Community Church was (and continues to be) a place with high ideals and true community, it was also a place that struggled with itself and its own frailty.

In the end, we have come to view this fragile authenticity as something that furthers the connection to the viewer, enhancing understanding and love while admitting complexity. The individuals at New Spirit Community Church demonstrate both strong faith and honesty in their personal struggles.

The reality of the film is that it is not solely concerned with LGBTQ faith. It is about a sense of isolation and the need for community to combat it. It is about determination in the face of adversity. It is about an overabundant and ever-mysterious desire for God and love.

To that effect, *New Spirits* evolved from being a verité documentary with the explicit goal of capturing the life of a small LGBTQ community into a celebration of broader human themes—home, guilt, shame, family, loyalty, absence. It is our hope that *New Spirits* will serve as a tool for a new discourse on the subject, one that honestly reflects the complicated nature of humanity.



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Key Creative Personnel

ANDREW FREER (DIRECTOR and PRODUCER)

Andrew Freer was born in Ohio, but grew up in Malang, Indonesia. Although Andrew graduated with a degree in International Relations, he became interested in film at Wheaton College in Illinois, and took a number of classes in cinema and filmmaking. In one of these classes he produced a feature-length film, *Nightlight*, that was shown at the I.U. South Bend Independent Video and Film Festival. A writer for The South Bend Tribune lauded the film, saying, "You feel like a fly on the wall watching these young adults chatting about their lives for an evening. I've never seen anything like it." The co-executive director of the Akron Independent Film Festival wrote of the film, "I watched it twice and found it to be a smart and sophisticated film that rang more true for me than Andrew Bujalski's attempts at naturalism...." Over the past four years, Andrew has worked as an editor, camera operator, grip, and production assistant on commercials, documentaries, and music videos in the Chicago area. Clients have included Resolution Digital Studios, PBS, National Geographic, Angle Park, Radar Studios, Coach Marketing, Film Garden Entertainment, and Citizen Film. Andrew Freer is the founder and owner of Heave-Ho Productions.

SAMUEL DÍAZ-LITTAUER (DIRECTOR)

Samuel Díaz-Littauer calls Bogotá, Colombia home, but spent his formative years traveling with his missionary parents across the Americas. While attending Wheaton College, Samuel explored the roots of faith and religious experience through the disciplines of philosophy and psychology. He began to study filmmaking in order to express and explore questions that naturally arose from these studies. His interest in social issues, from sexuality to diversity, emerged in his student film work as well as in his academic endeavors, garnering significant attention from film and psychology instructors alike. While still an undergraduate student, Samuel did research in sexual psychology and gender studies at the doctoral level. To date, Samuel has collaborated with Andrew Freer in many joint projects including *Nightlight* in early 2007, for which he did cinematography and camerawork. *Juxtaposition*, a short film Samuel wrote and directed, was also featured at Cornerstone Film Festival in Illinois in mid-2008.



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CLAIRE HARRIER (ASSOCIATE PRODUCER)

Claire Harrier was born in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, but spent most of her life on the move as the daughter of an Air Force officer. Claire studied theater and filmmaking at Wheaton College and graduated with a BA in Communication. While at Wheaton, she directed/wrote/starred in a feature length film entitled *After Dinner*, and contributed to a documentary *Hamlet Project* directed by her professor EJ Park. Claire has been a close contributor with Andrew and Samuel for the past four years, and has been heavily involved with camerawork, lighting, cinematography, and concept development for the film *New Spirits*.

LARS HAYNE (ASSOCIATE PRODUCER)

Lars Hayne was born in Portland, Oregon, and grew up in a small town outside the Minneapolis area. Taking an interest in filmmaking from an early age, he developed his skills in all aspects of the creative process throughout his adolescence. Lars brought this technical skill with him to Wheaton College, where he applied it in a variety of venues, culminating in a series of film classes taken during his junior year. His most notable project was a collection of seven short films entitled *Sleepless*, which he wrote, directed, and starred in. Lars has been a close contributor with the *New Spirits* team for the past four years, and has been heavily involved with camerawork, lighting, cinematography, and concept development for the film.



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