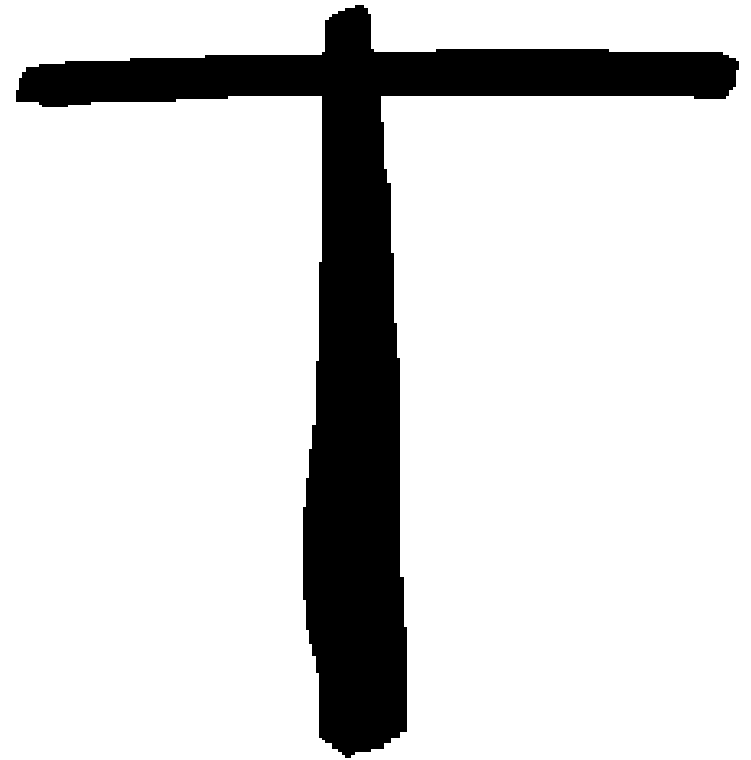


**THIRD ORDER**  
**Society of St Francis**  
*(European Province)*

# Celebrating Diversity



## **Assisi Booklet** **Number 3**

This Booklet is published for general use by the European Province of the Third Order of the Society of St Francis.

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For further information please send an email to:

[andrew.dotchin@stedmundsbury.anglican.org](mailto:andrew.dotchin@stedmundsbury.anglican.org)

## Contents

	Page
Background	3
Sexual Diversity	4
Biblical Interpretation	5
Homosexual Relationships	7
Personal Stories	9
Questions to Aid Discussion in Local Groups	26
Glossary	28
Organisations and Support Groups	29
Some Books and Reference Material	30

### Sexuality Working Group

The contents of this publication have been produced by the Sexuality Working Group as they seek on behalf of the Third Order to discern the way of a loving God - who loves all - in complex human relationship situations. It has been prepared as a contribution to the ongoing discussion on sexuality issues that surround General Chapter in York 2006.

The research carried out has been based on the responses to the 2004 Survey of the Third Order, and the content of the booklet represents the views of Group members and not necessarily those of the Third Order.

As the group met it realised that the issues raised, and especially the stories told, would be useful to Tertiaries and others beyond the meeting in York. They are offered here in the hope that they will enable many of us to 'celebrate diversity'.

The members of the Working Group were;  
John Fox, Nancy Adams, Alan Williams, Nina Brown, David Swain  
and Andrew Dotchin

# Celebrating Diversity



May God who created each one of us with endless variety,  
And who made us together as beautiful as the rainbow,  
Teach us to cherish the beauty within,  
To appreciate the gifts of others,  
And to be grateful for the enrichment  
so much difference brings.  
Amen

*The Theme Prayer on the facing page is taken from:*

**Parish Renewal: Volume 2, Resources**, ed. Donal Harrington. Columba 1999

## Background

The material in this booklet has resulted from the work carried out by the Sexuality Group set up to address relevant issues in the run up to General Chapter at York on 3 to 5 August 2006. The main topic involved is homosexuality, and the appropriate response of Christians to homosexual people – since the issue has the potential of causing schism in the Church.

TSSF in the European Province first addressed sexual orientation openly through the 'Sexuality' edition of the Chronicle in Winter 1997, following an inspirational talk by the then TSSF Minister General, Alden Whitney, at the Convocation of the American Province in New Orleans entitled 'Homosexuality: Genetics versus Choice', a summary of which was included in that Chronicle. Alden was both a priest and a psychiatrist and consequently well qualified to talk about this subject; the original talk was prepared in 1996 for his colleagues at Norwalk Hospital in Connecticut. The Chronicle also explored related issues widely – there were articles on lesbian Christian spirituality, on pastoral care for transsexuals, on transgendered people in Los Angeles, on Kairos in Soho, as well as personal stories from tertiaries affected by sexual orientation issues.

This booklet is therefore something of a carrying forward of this initial exploration. The Group started by considering the implications for tertiaries of Days 7, 8 and 9 of the TSSF Principles, to which we are all committed. The Group has found that these principles provide remarkably clear guidance about the way that we should behave regarding the sexual orientation issue. The whole emphasis is on justice and equality for all, on spreading love and harmony rather than dissension or schism. So the Group has been at pains to achieve a tolerant and conciliatory understanding of these sexuality issues, and believes that it might be appropriate, perhaps, for TSSF to take a lead in promoting tolerance and compassion in the face of the polarised views being taken by many in the Church today.

Tertiaries will have read about the outcome of the sexual orientation survey carried out in 2004, in both Third Order News and the Winter Chronicle, so the detailed findings will not be repeated here. The following main features arose:

1. **Sexual Diversity:** Though sizeable majorities of responding tertiaries considered sexual diversity to be an acceptable feature of God's creation (72%), and acknowledged that a sexual orientation spectrum exists in human beings (71%), the balance of respondents were in some doubt about these features.
2. **Biblical Interpretation:** 61% of respondents claimed that the bible neither supports nor condemns homosexuality, whilst 25% thought it condemning.
3. **Homosexual Relationships:** 58% expressed support for homosexual priests living with a partner, though the balance felt that celibacy was called for.
4. **TSSF Membership:** A healthy majority considered that homosexual people should be welcomed as members of the Third Order (77%).

These four aspects are considered in the following sections.

### From the Principles of the Third Order

#### The Second Aim:

To spread the spirit of love and harmony

(Day 7) Our Order sets out, in the name of Christ, to break down barriers between people and to seek equality for all. We accept as our second aim the spreading of a spirit of love and harmony among all people.

We are pledged to fight against the ignorance, pride, and prejudice that breed injustice or partiality of any kind.

(Day 8) We as members of The Third Order fight against all such injustice in the name of Christ, in whom there can be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for in Him all are one.

Our chief object is to reflect that openness to all which was characteristic of Jesus. This can only be achieved in a spirit of chastity which sees others as belonging to God and not as a means of self-fulfilment

(Day 9) We as Tertiaries are prepared not only to speak out for social justice and international peace, but to put these principles into practice in our own lives, cheerfully facing any scorn or persecution to which this may lead.

*The full text of the Principles may be found at <http://orders.anglican.org/tssf/principles.html>*

## Sexual Diversity

A book published in 1993, 'Liberating Sex – A Christian Sexual Theology' by Adrian Thatcher (SPCK), addresses the various aspects that the group is exploring on behalf of the Third Order. Thatcher comments early on in the book: 'Sexual theology is Christian when it derives from a sharing in the vision and experience of God as love, made known in Jesus Christ. The role of the Bible in sexual theology must be that of testifying to that vision and experience.' The author sets the scene up front and tackles just about every contentious issue that has arisen subsequently in recent years.

A particularly interesting factor in the book (p 128) is a description of the research on sexual experience carried out by Alfred Kinsey in 1948, and his use of the 7-point 'Kinsey Scale' (as it is now called) related to sexual behaviour. The 7 points are:

- 0 Fully heterosexual, with no homosexual experience
- 1 Predominantly heterosexual, with incidental homosexual experience
- 2 Basically heterosexual, with significant homosexual experience
- 3 Bisexual, with significant heterosexual and homosexual experience
- 4 Basically homosexual, with significant heterosexual experience
- 5 Predominantly homosexual, with incidental heterosexual experience
- 6 Fully homosexual, with no heterosexual experience

Kinsey wrote in this context: *'The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. Not all things are black or all things white. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. The sooner we learn this concerning human sexual behaviour the sooner we shall reach a sound understanding of the realities of sex.'*

There have been countless research projects carried out since this early work, the most recent being that published by the Scottish Executive, Social Research into Sexual Orientation, in 2003 (copies of the reports may be obtained from The Stationery Office Bookshop, 71 Lothian Road, Edinburgh EH3 9AZ). The main relevance of these studies for tertiaries, we suggest, is the general agreement that human sexuality gives rise to a range of sexual orientation and behaviour. Research would appear to indicate that only 5 to 10% of the population can be considered fully heterosexual, whilst mainstream media reports cite some 4 to 5% as being fully homosexual – this leaves the bulk of humanity somewhere in between.

In the seminal address given by Alden Whitney in 1997 on 'Homosexuality: Genetics versus Choice' our former Minister General sought to explore the genetic influences on sexual identity, and quoted the research of Dean Hamer that was published in his book 'The Science of Desire' (Simon and Schuster, 1994). Hamer had detected a genetic marker on the X chromosome, which he claimed influenced male sexual orientation. Later, in 1997, Hamer wrote: 'Sexuality is too complex to ever be completely explained by genes. Although DNA may influence brain chemistry and thus tilt us to feel and behave in particular ways, it does not govern sexual identity. Predisposition is not predetermination. The social and cultural environment will always play a major role, as will chance and serendipity, choice and free will.'

## Biblical Interpretation

It should perhaps be mentioned initially that references in the Bible regarding homosexuality are few and far between – for example, much more is said about the wrongs of 'divorce', reinforced through comments by Jesus himself. However, the marriage of divorced persons, including clergy, has become much more acceptable to the Church in the present time. Yet traditionalists who oppose a Christian acceptance of homosexual relationships place great emphasis on these few references, and tend to understand them entirely literally. The interpretation of the passages concerned is thus highly contentious. The most appropriate and scholarly interpretation that we have found so far is included in a recent book by Gareth Moore, a Dominican priest and Oxford lecturer in theology and philosophy, entitled 'A Question of Truth – Christianity and Homosexuality' (Continuum 2003). Below is an attempt to summarise his findings related to each of these notable passages:

### ▽ Genesis 19.1-11: The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Moore explains that this passage is essentially about the contrasting hospitality shown by Abraham and Lot with the inhospitality and dishonour displayed by the men of Sodom, who clearly intend to rape Lot's guests. Consequently, Lot offers his two daughters to the citizens of Sodom as a less dishonourable act compared with the insulting of his guests. Moore believes that the ensuing destruction was primarily a result of the wickedness of their aggressive inhospitality rather than any homosexual act involved. Apparently, the citizens of Sodom wanted to humiliate the (supposed) male visitors by treating them as women sexually – the highest form of humiliation, since the sexual hierarchy of the time placed men higher than women.

### ▽ Leviticus 18.22 & 20.13: The abomination of lying with a male.

Moore addresses these verses by drawing attention to the sexual inequality that existed at the time they were written. *'It was considered the role of men to be active, to lead, to command, to be strong, to possess, and of women to be passive, to follow, to obey, to be weak, to be possessed.'* In this context, men were considered to be superior to women, and their (basically penetrative) sexual activity was thought of as embodying this. There was perceived to be a divine plan of male dominance, which was symbolised by the sexual penetration of the woman by the man. Consequently, this quoted law forbids a man treating a man sexually as he would treat a woman, because it is counter to the accepted divine hierarchy rather than a homosexual act as such.

### ▽ Romans 1: Shameful female and male desires.

Moore comments that a superficial understanding of the text would imply that, in verses 26, 27, Paul straightforwardly condemns the homosexual practice of men with men and women with women. Moore then cautions against such a literal interpretation, highlighting initially that the chapter *'is primarily an attack on Gentiles, the vast majority of humanity who do not worship exclusively the one true God, the God of Israel.'* Paul's focus is upon the sins of the Gentiles and their idolatry, and he does not actually use the term of 'sin' in connection with same-sex activity, nor does he include this in the list of 'things not to be done' in verses 29-31. Moore explores various interpretations concerning Paul's condemnation of the Gentiles, who he claimed had been led into

uncleanness by means of their desires or passions. One scholar, Robin Scroggs, has commented that pederasty was the predominant same-sex practice of the time, which Paul is focusing on and which any Christian would condemn; the modern debate, however, is about the admissibility of adult, consenting, reciprocal relationships. As is well known, Paul suggests that those unable to master their passions should marry, which is 'a remedy against sin'. So, would God deny homosexual persons a similar remedy? Another aspect raised by Moore is the possibility that Paul's strictures do not apply to those who do not reject God. The Group concludes that it is possibly promiscuity that is being condemned, rather than committed same-sex relationships, and that we should pay heed to this feature rather than take the passage too literally.

### ▽ 1 Corinthians 6.9-10: Inheritors of the Kingdom of God

The issue here concerns the translation of the Greek words used by Paul in the list of those who he claims will not inherit the Kingdom of God – what is the most realistic meaning? Moore addresses the two key words *malakos* and *arsenokoites*.

*Malakos* apparently means *soft*, and it would seem that Paul disapproved mainly of any softness in men, without any implication of a particular sexual behaviour. Throughout the list of non-inheritors Paul uses unambiguously masculine forms, despite feminine forms being available. Consequently there is ambiguity as to what exactly Paul meant by this term.

*Arsenokoites* is apparently obscure, but is thought to concern sexual activity between males. From the views of Philo, Paul's contemporary, it would appear that the most likely interpretation would be 'pederast'. Through the sexual act the young passive partner debases his masculinity and effectively becomes a woman, with the older partner actively teaching and encouraging him. Moore concludes that Paul is denouncing one very specific form of male-male sexual relationship that feminizes the way of life of one of the partners, and condemning it mainly because of the counter-cultural effeminacy involved.

### ▽ 1 Timothy 1:10: 'Sodomites'

The word *arsenokoites* crops up again here, and may mean the same as suggested above, but there is an additional possibility that it could refer to the sexual clients of boy slaves.

Moore's forthright conclusion is that 'if we look for cogent biblical or natural-law arguments against homosexual relationships and acts in general, we will not find them: there aren't any. There are plenty which look faithful to Scripture and compelling in their logic, but none which actually are.'

## Homosexual Relationships

If tertiary accept that the Bible does not condemn homosexual practice, then consideration has to be given to an acceptance of the relationships of homosexual persons, including priests. The Church of England's formal position has been set out in 'Issues in Human Sexuality', published by the House of Bishops in 1991 (updated in 2003), which basically calls for celibacy among gay priests and asks that the Church should listen to homosexual people, to pray and consider further the issues involved for the Church. The Chair of the original Working Group was Bishop John Baker, Bishop of Salisbury at the time. He subsequently, when retired, gave a Lecture at St Martin-in-the-Fields in 1997 entitled 'Homosexuality and Christian ethics: a new way forward', in which he felt 'obliged to dissent from that judgement (enforcing celibacy). I cannot see that married heterosexual clergy have a right to deny their homosexual brothers and sisters the potential spiritual blessing of a sexual relationship when they themselves enjoy that blessing.' Bishop Baker had significantly changed his mind, and was prepared to say so publicly, the first of a number of initiatives that have taken place since.

In a courageous response to the Windsor Report and Primates Meeting in Ireland in February 2005, the College of Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church issued a Statement which affirmed the integrity of its gay clergy and set it apart from the Church of England by stating publicly their established policy on the ordination of gay clergy living in a committed same sex partnership.

*'The Scottish Episcopal Church has never regarded the fact that someone was in a close relationship with a member of the same sex as in itself constituting a bar to the exercise of an ordained ministry. Indeed, the Windsor Report itself in suggesting that a Moratorium be placed on such persons being consecrated bishops, itself acknowledges the existence of many such relationships within the Church....*

*The Scottish Episcopal Church has, even before the 1998 Lambeth Conference, sought to be welcoming and open to persons of homosexual orientation in our congregations, and to listen to their experiences. This has on occasion led clergy to respond to requests to give a blessing to persons who were struggling with elements in their relationship, and who asked for such a prayer...*

*The College of Bishops is conscious that the pressures within the debate on matters of sexuality vary from one province to another. Within our Province the debate tends to focus on matters to do with scriptural authority and human rights and justice. We sense that we are privileged in that we are a small province, and discussion across differences may be more easily achieved in our life than in other parts of the Communion. ...*

*We are conscious that as a Church we are much indebted in our life both to a significant presence of persons of homosexual (lesbian and gay) orientation, and also to those whose theology and stance would be critical of attitudes to sexuality other than abstinence outside marriage. We rejoice in both..'*

*(from The Windsor Report/Primates' Communique - A Response from the College of Bishops - 4 March 2005, in 'News' section of the Scottish Episcopal Church website: [www.scotland.anglican.org](http://www.scotland.anglican.org))*

In this context the TSSF Group has come across two very interesting ventures that have been launched since 1991. Their mission and methods are described briefly in what follows.

### ▽ ‘Changing Attitude’

Founded in 1995, Changing Attitude (a registered charity) is a network of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and heterosexual members of the Anglican churches in the UK (website [www.changingattitude.org](http://www.changingattitude.org)). Their strapline is ‘Working for Gay and Lesbian affirmation within the Anglican Communion’. It aims to help move forward the debate about human sexuality in the Anglican Church by: Raising awareness: Providing education: Introducing their experience: Building relationships: Integrating sexuality and spirituality. Changing Attitude has achieved significant success in raising awareness and now has either a contact representative or local group in each of the 44 Dioceses in the Church of England – with a separate, linked organisation covering Scotland (website [www.changingattitudescotland.org.uk](http://www.changingattitudescotland.org.uk))

The Group met Sally Rogers, their Development Worker based in London, in November 2004. Sally explained how CA was organised and how TSSF and CA might benefit mutually from a co-operative approach. To our astonishment, we found that three known tertiaries were already actively involved in leading Diocesan initiatives, and we were offered the facility of calling upon CA speakers for Area Meetings in the run up to York 2006. The first of these took place in March 2005, when Sally and John-Francis Friendship (formerly Brother John Francis, SSF) spoke to the East London and South Essex Area.

### ▽ ‘Courage’

Courage is an unusually interesting UK-based, not-for-profit, evangelical Christian organisation, formed in 1988 (website [www.courage.org.uk](http://www.courage.org.uk)). Their ethos is that: ‘We believe in a positive and radiant Christianity for the gay Christian. We do not believe that gay Christians are sub-standard, sick, or second-class. Our fellowship is a place where God is at work amongst us –where we are secure in the love of God, centred in Christ and led by the Holy Spirit.’ The organisation appears primarily to be a Christian fellowship that meets from time to time to provide support and encouragement to its members. It so happened that a TSSF Group shared premises with Courage at the Royal Foundation of St Katherine when holding a Reading Weekend in March 2004. Some of us got talking with the members present and heard some heart-rending stories; one young man, who wanted to be ordained, was thrown out of his church because he was homosexual (he had planned to get married to cover this up, but broke off the engagement when he realised it would compromise his integrity). It was evident that the fellowship provided a much needed source of comfort to many gay Christians. Jeremy Marks, the founder, originally believed that homosexual people could be ‘cured’, we understand, and set up Courage having discovered that this was both a flawed and potentially damaging approach.

## Personal Stories

The majority of tertiaries already welcome homosexual people as members of TSSF, and many emphasised they thought there should be no distinction about this aspect. Others, the Group included, felt that there was a case for raising awareness to the outside world that TSSF welcomed homosexuals, in view of the distressing experience of many we have come across who feel excluded. It is a fine balance, but the Group has come to believe that TSSF has an opportunity, as a Christian religious Order, to lead the way on a conciliatory path within the Church, in co-operation with Changing Attitude, Courage and like-minded organisations. For example, the author and journalist Jo Ind has a ‘Eucharistic vision of us being one people round one table, where we are no longer aware of the particular sexualities we represent, any more than we are aware of our different genders, cultural identities and so on’. Doesn’t that sound Franciscan to you? From this viewpoint, the TSSF Local Group in Edinburgh has drawn together a series of personal stories to demonstrate just how homosexual people feel about their own lives and the way they are seen by others. Many of these stories are from Tertiaries and/or their families. The rest are from other Anglicans.

### ▽ From a male tertiary.

Before arriving at my present church, I sent my personal details to the future priest-in-charge, including the information about my sexuality (and that of my partner!). Subsequently I have learned that his response (in the Sacristy) to the Vestry Treasurer was “A queer, or two, eh?” We suspect that he is homophobic and unable to look at the issue, or to let us have any position other than as congregants. If it persists, we shall confront him. Within the local church, there are none who do not know that we are homosexual. Some ignore us (will not exchange glances, speak, let alone exchange a kiss-of-peace!), whilst others accept us without a problem; some simply distance themselves. It is not a welcoming or an inclusive church, but there is no other Episcopalian congregation within 50 miles. Why do we bother?

The Church of England response to Human Sexuality issues has been unprincipled, and intellectually and ethically untenable; the Episcopal Church in USA appears much more inclusive. The Scottish Episcopal Church? We shall see, won’t we? The Church (esp. Church of England) has responded abominably to national human rights legislation in respect of non-discrimination in employment on the basis of sexual orientation (i.e., by seeking a dispensation to this legislation that excludes religious institutions from enforcing this). There should be no exceptions.

Unsurprisingly my recent Church experience has affected my relationship with God adversely. It has severely marginalised my church-allegiance, but not my God-commitment. As to myself, it has persuaded me even more that issues of integrity are central. By and large, my relationships with other Scottish Episcopal Church members have been good and encouraging. I have to say that I am concerned — even suspicious — about how the Bench will respond to Eames. Most (even the best intentioned) seem to think that the evangelicals have somehow got a stronger case and need appeasing ... as if! Not many seem to take the trouble to be well acquainted with such aspects as gay theology — which they ought to be!

I would dearly like a church blessing of my homosexual partnership, so long as the blessing would be open and unconditional. I have in the past been an ordinand, and close to seeking ordination several times. But having seen bishops renege on undertakings given to open gay ordained men, I would neither trust them, nor offer myself in these circumstances. I was formerly married and have three grown-up children, though am now widowed. When I “came out” to my wife, we worked through it together and (almost) succeeded! By and large, the children have been fully supportive, but this is a complex and nuanced situation that I do not feel free to be public with.

### ▽ From a gay man who was married and has two sons.

I have not told the whole of the congregation about being a gay man, only those I have discerned to be appropriate. My fantasy is that I would be rejected if I were to make this known publicly, particularly to those whom I have known for a number of years. The previous Bishop knew, and all the Rectors and Clergy. I had thought that, in the early days, when sexuality was more acceptable in wider terms, and in a marriage, it would have been much easier for me to feel more acceptable; however, being married and gay I felt I was the only one. When my marriage ended, I still felt isolated and a sense of guilt because of my sexuality.

My marriage broke up because my wife wanted her freedom. Before we married, I told her about my sexuality, so I was a gay man in a heterosexual relationship. It was not a marriage of convenience, it was out of love and a very deep friendship, but my wife is no longer involved with the church and is not a Christian. My two sons, however, are supportive.

I have in the past been involved with the Metropolitan Community Church as an interim Pastoral leader, though, to avoid bringing anything upon the very vulnerable membership, I left at the time of a police investigation following an accusation about my behaviour. During this three-year involvement, I encountered the diversity of sexuality first hand, and felt sadness, pain and anger about non-acceptance in the mainstream churches, perhaps most of all amongst those who were transgendered and Christian. It was a joy to see many blossom in their belief, since members felt passionate about their faith. I felt at ease with myself, because, being no longer married, I met others in a similar situation, and felt less isolated and less guilty. It was OK! This was a Church that practised relationship blessings and Holy Unions which could only be recognised by its own congregations. And perhaps less covert than the mainstream churches such as the Scottish Episcopal Church, which seems to bless same sex relationships only in private, carried out by clergy who are accepting. With the Metropolitan Church there seemed to be a Christ-Centred wholeness about the blessing ceremonies; they were based on the spirituality of David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi and their commitment, and weren't a mock up of heterosexual marriages.

I feel angry whenever the issue of sexuality is brought into debate; it feels like an infringement of my human rights as a gay man, a church deciding what I should do. The Jeffrey John issue brought up in me a well of anger; here was a good churchman having to stand down, in humility, because of his sexuality. As a contact for LGCM, (Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement) I have known quite a number of priests and other ministers

who are gay and in relationships behind the Church's back. It seems to me that there is an infringement of Human Rights in the Church, not only with the issues around homosexuality, but also around the issue of women in the Priesthood. We are perhaps more fortunate in the Scottish Church, but I am aware that there are the right-wingers who resist. The words used against gay people from the Bible, e.g. *abomination* (which is misconstrued and out of context) are dangerous to those of us who are vulnerable in our sexuality, which in my experience means being on the end of a phone to someone who feels suicidal because of these issues. The men who gave me support after my marriage broke up were Franciscans. Now I play a solo saxophone.

A quote from Carl Gustav Jung: “The homosexual is endowed with a wealth of religious feelings which help to bring the ecclesia spiritualis into reality, and a spiritual receptivity which makes him responsive to revelation.”

### ▽ From a gay man who was in a couple relationship.

Bill and I were together for 21 years until his death from cancer nearly three years ago.

Although we both had a strong Christian faith, only he attended the local village Church. I did not attend because of the attitude of the Anglican Church to being gay. After he died, I started to attend Church and felt that God was supporting me at this difficult time. I decided to become a full member of the church family, received instruction and was confirmed. The Priest in Charge carried out the instruction, but at the same time preached from the pulpit against homosexuality and it was obvious that this sermon was directed at me. Later on he spoke to me in the church along similar lines.

During Bill's illness, he never visited him and it was left to the Lay Reader, Margaret, to visit and give comfort to Bill. At the time and since then she has been a good friend; at times I found it difficult to manage without her spiritual guidance. The Priest visited me once after Bill died.

Turning to the congregation, who were of the older generation, they were totally different. They were very kind and supportive. They and the other villagers accepted Bill and me for what we were, gay and friendly. In fact, the Church was full at Bill's funeral, which really surprised me and his family, who were far from kind to Bill when he was alive - but that's another story.

My church experience has not affected my relationship with God; it is now stronger than ever. However, I do not attend the local Church, but go elsewhere. I could not accept the Host from such a bigot.

## ▽ From a gay man who was married in earlier life.

I think I always knew that I was gay. There, that's got me started at any rate – so much for those worries! Growing up in 1960s Edinburgh should not have been too bad. I was the eldest of three boys, living in genteel suburbia in what I now recognise as being one of the most beautiful cities I know. We were not (and, apart from me, still are not) a religious family. I felt different from an early age. I always believed in a God – his early manifestation was pure Blakeian, long beard etc., and almost certainly vengeful and stern. Feeling that “separateness” was hard for me, I think I was probably an introverted and secretive child. I don't have many memories of being happy, only very rarely. I used to make pacts with God: if I do this well, can I have a treat of some sort, whatever that treat might be?

I should say that running as a thread through this story is the kind of relationship that I had with my father. We were never close – he died suddenly about 6 years ago and I am glad to say that we had nothing outstanding (in the sense of being left unsaid) when that happened. Nevertheless, it was not easy between us whilst he was alive.

After I left school, I read Law at Edinburgh University. It was not a great choice of subject but I got through it and graduated in 1978. However, the biggest thing to happen to me around this time was my joining Old St Paul's church in Jeffrey Street. I started in the choir (my great love had been classical music and singing since I was about 10 years old) in 1975, encouraged by a music teacher from school. I was confirmed in 1979, aged 22. It was like a way into a new world. Of course, I loved the music and the ceremony – I think I was always secretly rather a flamboyant type! It was through OSP, in 1980, that I met Lynne. It was quite simply a life-transforming event for me and one for which I thank God every day. We started living together as a matter of convenience; I said to her one day when she had been studying for a university re-sit exam that she needn't go back home. I felt at last that my life was on track – though my parents (especially my father) were not at all happy at the way that things were developing with Lynne. Maybe I didn't tell them enough how happy I was that we were living together; at last I felt that I could hide my gayness so that the world thought that I was “normal.” I was not “out” to my parents; it was partly (mostly?) to keep my father quiet, I think, that I stayed well locked away in the closet.

We were married on 26 October 1985 in OSP – a wonderful day, surrounded by friends and family. But even the night before I was in denial – I sat on my own in the house of my best man, watching a gay programme on TV. We had quite an eventful life together as a couple for a total of about 10 years. Lynne's parents (both now sadly dead) were always very supportive; I think they could see how happy she was. We had very many good times and some less good. We were keen on having children but, if I am brutally honest, it didn't help that our sex life was very intermittent, practically non-existent.

It was not long after that, comparatively speaking, that she said that she was leaving me. She had got to the stage that she could not, after all, live without having a full relationship with me. She had thought that getting less than 100% from me was something with which she could cope, but it wasn't enough. I fully accept that I was denying Lynne a substantial part of her “femaleness.” I don't remember too much about a painful period

(apart from a lot of tears) but I do know from then and subsequently that I was the little brother that she never had and that she was the big sister I had never had. We still have a very mutually protective relationship, which I feel speaks volumes about what we mean to each other. After the separation, I would say that it took over two years to get to the stage we are at now. We worshipped at OSP throughout all our life together and after we separated; I am not sure what most people thought – I think that some disapproved when we lived together, and some disapproved when we separated! On the whole, though, I firmly believe that the church has been supportive and not judgmental.

In summary, then, I think that there were difficult issues in my earlier life involving sexuality and self-esteem, though things are greatly improved now. That is probably due more to my growing up and accepting myself for who I am. OSP definitely played its part in this; my present church less so, since the earlier issues were not so relevant. I have always had a strong faith and I don't think that my sexuality had a poor effect on my relationship with God; it was always a matter of questions, not doubts.

## ▽ ..... and from his wife.

I well remember the very first time I met my husband. I was a newcomer at my church, having just arrived at university in Edinburgh, and he was a member of the choir. A friend and I went for a drink with the choir one Sunday night after evensong and we both thought what a lovely set of ‘camp queens’ the choir was!

Over the years my friendship with Peter grew. He was the kid brother I had desperately wanted all my life, having been an only child, and he was also a very good friend. I had come to university as a mature student, after an unhappy first marriage, and here was a man I could relate to, who was not a threat to me. Unfortunately, my studies did not go so well at the end of my second year and I had to re-sit an exam. So did my flatmates and the atmosphere at home was pretty stressful. Peter had just bought his first home and he suggested I use it during the day while he was at work, for some peaceful study time. He gave me a key and for some inexplicable reason I stayed there permanently! We began to live together as a couple, having never even been through a period of courtship; I guess we both had needs which were being fulfilled.

We did actually fall in love and I still cringe at some of our embarrassing behaviour! But there was no sexual activity to speak of; this was not of my doing. We eventually got engaged and both of us were excited at the thought of a big wedding in our church, surrounded by people we loved. I had to get permission from the bishop first, being a divorcee, and I remember that he put me through a terrible grilling. I am sure many of our friends were concerned about the sexuality angle of our relationship, as most of Peter's friends knew he was gay, although he would never admit it. We both wanted children but, as I kept saying to Peter, I doubted whether a second immaculate conception was on the cards! Peter was quite content to talk about having children, but seemed incapable of dealing with the practicalities. We eventually went to see a sex therapist and this had an amazing result; for a time I could actually live in hope, but nothing came of it. I did undergo an investigation and it seemed the problem was probably with me. IVF was suggested but by this time I was approaching 40 and I was not prepared to put myself or my relationship through all the stress that that entailed.



So we carried on with what was, in so many ways, a very good partnership. We were 'good together'. We did enquire about adoption but, with my age, it would have had to be an older child, and all of a sudden I became terrified of the Social Services delving into our relationship and discovering the truth about Peter's sexuality. Things changed after that. I had a very stressful job, working with the homeless. I had no support from the people I was working for during a long period when I was left in charge due to illness, and eventually something snapped inside me. I became infatuated with someone else and realised that I could no longer cope with being married to a gay man. I left.

Peter's life fell apart, a fact which still fills me with guilt. But eventually he began to cope and at last, he 'came out'. This brought a sad reaction from his parents, who had been quite content to cast me in the role of the wicked woman who had destroyed their son. But he eventually grew in confidence and, due to redundancies, moved to London. He now has a very good job, is very highly thought of, and his membership of a large choir has taken him all round the world.

And what of me? I still very much regret that my marriage to Peter did not work out. There was so much that was good in it. Peter is still my best friend and we are in contact most days and spend holidays and Christmases together. I guess I also shut my eyes to his sexuality and thought I could cope. And there was always a forlorn hope that Peter would change in his attitude towards me sexually. But towards the end of the relationship, I had begun to think about the possibility of his having affairs with other men and whether I could cope with that. He had never actually given me any cause for concern whatsoever on that front and, indeed, I think he was too frightened to contemplate such a thing. But this fear was growing in me and for a time, I confess, my attitude towards homosexuality was not very charitable. Most of our friends at church know why Peter and I split up. I guess we were lucky in attending a church that attracts a significant gay presence. Our rector at the time made it quite clear that he thought we ought to stay together, but I think that had more to do with his opinion of marriage rather than his views on sexuality. But even now, I do not always tell some people the real reason, because I do not want them to be prejudiced against Peter. I guess I am still protecting my 'kid brother'!

### ▽ From a gay male rejected ordinand.

I am a sort-of-closeted, celibate, gay man in my early fifties. I say "sort-of-closeted" because I neither deny what I am, and always have been, nor do I discuss my orientation with any but my very closest, and mostly gay, friends. I think that most people know what I am, or at least they think they do. Strangely though, my relatives have always been blind to it. They are very conventional, and either seem to put my differences down to my eccentricity or my work/politics. I don't "disappoint them" by outward displays or even discussions (they simply couldn't handle it). I sometimes have cause for regret, though, in that both my parents, whom I loved dearly, are now dead and they never really knew me; rather the "dutiful son" who never let them down.

Despite never having had any confirmation, I also suspect that members of "our" congregation also know what I am, but I continue to be well respected for my abilities, intelligence and my deep interest in Episcopalianism, and all things "religious." They

are, almost to a person, the warmest, most generous people that I've ever met. Again, I wouldn't embarrass them by open display or argument, I think too highly of them, and I don't want to be treated differently and we all know that that happens!

As can be imagined, all of this "Living Half a Life" has had its own consequences. In the past I have suffered from intense bouts of truly severe depression, have had years of wanting to die and also have had many "long moments" of self-destructive urges. I had, sadly, internalised all of those teachings and comments you hear about Queers, Fags, Nancy-Boys, and Predatory-Perverts/Paedophiles that are "The Cross" which all of my kind have to bear. When will Straight People realise that being gay and being a paedophile are not synonymous? Or that being gay is not an infectious condition? This ended when I realised that I am what God made me (and what God causes to be, can't be bad or evil). Round about the time of that particular epiphany, certain 'scales fell from my eyes' as I realised that I was surrounded by other 'gay Christians'; clergy (mostly) and lay who had managed, by various subterfuges, to remain in, derive great comfort from and to serve within - more often to a greater extent than 'straight' Christians - my beloved Episcopal Church. Sometimes they were even, but with more difficulty, from other denominations. Without that knowledge, I doubt that I could have remained within the Church; to know that there were, and are, others like me is a great source of strength.

This mutual support in recent years continues to buoy me when doubt or diminishing self-worth creeps in. I hope that it comes through my writing that I have a sense of vocation; I was presented for selection for ordination training ten years or so ago. I have always felt that I should be a priest and that, perhaps, I should be *Pater et Frater* i.e., a priest and a monk (preferably Franciscan) though until pressed resisted that call. I simply didn't think that you could be what I am and be good enough to be priested. My idea of priesthood continues to be that of 'a walking sacrament'; how could I be a sacrament, of any kind, with thoughts like mine? I can't go into the details of my rejection for training, as I don't want to identify either myself or the other parties involved, though the story is quite well known locally. Suffice it to say that my then 'parish priest', in a very devious and underhand way, rejected me despite pretence to the contrary. I believe, although I have no proof, that it came about as a result of his inability to accept difference. We never discussed my homosexuality, but his whole attitude to me changed as a result of a very brief, anonymous and unimportant conversation which we had around gay involvement in the church and, I suppose, basic human rights. To sum up the above sad chapter, I have never felt more fulfilled or happy in my entire life than when it seemed I might be allowed to take ordination training, and never felt more rejected or hurt than when it was denied me.

Since that time I've come to think that the Church could be more supportive and loving to its 'rejects', regardless of their orientation, since no attempt was made to help me cope with the change in my expectations and circumstances, as has been confirmed by other presentees. My solace now, as then, is that though the Church may have rejected my vocation, I don't believe that God has. I still wait to serve, but, sadly, I am older, maybe in some ways wiser and also slightly more cynical. I should also state that I bear no grudge against that former parish priest; I forgave him a long time ago, in fact, very shortly after the debacle. Predictably, I am very used to those attitudes; you get that way when you're used to being shouted after in the streets and discriminated against in the

work place. Somehow, though, you expect better from the Church and its Priesthood. To close the vocation story, I should perhaps mention that many clergy and lay people still believe that I have a vocation to the priesthood, and encourage me to submit myself again for training, but I am wary about this; I don't think that I could take another rejection - especially not on those grounds. Strangely none of the above has ever caused my faith to waver, in fact, I believe it's been strengthened by it all. It has also caused me to look more closely at gay and liberation theologies and to understand more clearly God's love for us ALL. I think that I understand now, better than ever, the concept of Total Unconditional Love.

With regard to the wider implications for the Communion, I don't concern myself too much with the present debate, but concern myself with developments in the Scottish Episcopal Church which I hope that I, and others, can influence. I don't see the great divide here between evangelicals and liberals, which is the current worry of the Church in the wider Communion. I do, however, understand the implications of the First World imposing its will on the rest of the Church / Third World (that way lies schism). I think that change will come, even there, and over time with our own more minor divisions. It has been said: "two hundred years ago it was inconceivable that we would ever condemn slavery or condone the priesthood of women." We seem to have managed, mostly, both of those and, with God's grace, and time, we will all accept that even queers are equal in the sight of God and that their vocation/s and behaviour/s are no less valid. Meanwhile, we (i.e., gay people) continue to deal with the brickbats and slanders of daily secular and religious life. God grant that it will have been worth it! Amen.

### ▽ From a woman in a lesbian relationship.

For as long as I can remember, I have always sought and enjoyed the company of women. I never considered myself as anything other than 'normal' until I left home. Throughout my life, my friendships and strong relationships have always been with females and all my positive role models and influences, with the exception of my dad, have been women. I was fortunate to have a very stable, loving and supportive home life, where I was encouraged in all my endeavours. The only people I wanted to please were myself and my parents, and in general, I felt I was not a disappointment. As a family who always sat down together and talked, we were encouraged to voice our opinions, even if they were not 'the party line'. My parents led by example and I was brought up as a Christian with a sense of right and wrong, an interest in justice and a volunteer spirit. As far as life choices were concerned the old style church values and moral conduct was the only way to lead one's life.

However, my parents, wittingly or otherwise, also gave me an inbuilt sense of worth and an open mind. This was to prove ironic as, on receiving the news that I was going to live with a woman, I was met with "If this is your choice you are no longer part of our family". "What have we done to deserve this?" "Why are you doing this to us?" "We didn't bring you up to be like this." This was followed by many biblical references about a life of sin and a wasted life. Having the church and religion brought into the argument infuriated and saddened me. It left me thinking that if the Church believed that loving someone and committing oneself to another human being was wrong, then I distrusted it. If The

Church made a family say "You are no longer part of our family" and was morally justified in doing so, I questioned it. I felt that it was a case of using their religious beliefs and not facing reality. I was no stranger to the Bible; I was brought up with it. In addition, I had turned to it on many occasions for making a point when speech making at school. No matter what we were debating - I always pulled out a line to justify my argument. I had also used the 'no sex before marriage belief' as a way of masking my discomfort of all things intimate with boyfriends in the past. In reality, it was simply a case of being terrified of something totally unnatural for me.

My relationship with my partner was the age-old story of meeting and falling in love with someone - someone who just happened to be a woman, in my partner's case, but inevitably a woman in mine. Early on in our friendship, which was developing into something more, my now partner (P) encouraged me to meet and date men, wanting for me a 'normal' happy family life, not wanting to go in the direction we were headed. When I finally met the perfect man (M), and as our relationship developed, it occurred to me that, despite his qualities and my acceptance of his being everything I could have hoped for in a man, it was wrong for me. At the time, P was looking to buy a new house and I kept thinking that I wanted to go with her. I phoned a friend to seek advice. She knew very well of P's importance in my life, despite not ever having discussed it with her, and she asked what I really wanted, what was stopping me? My answer was that I wanted to live with P, to be a couple and what was stopping me was my parents, society and my conditioning. Her advice was that you live your life everyday and what you believe will make you both happy is worth trying. So I told P how I felt, what I hoped for and she agreed that it was not an easy life we were about to undertake, but agreed that we should at least try. The next day I met with M and broke the news. This proved to me what a wonderful person he was; we both cried and hugged and he said that he was sad but that I couldn't live a life that was not right for me and that he was glad to help me find who I was. He was absolutely right and that was 10 years ago.

In the years in between, there was very little that could be said between my parents and me that didn't end in tears. There were many times I wondered if there was any point in trying to keep in contact. It was P who encouraged me, as she believed that doors should always be kept open and she knew that my family was very important to me. Over time, we eventually came together as a family and the years of difficulties are a thing of the past. We are now both welcome and very involved in the life of my family. I have also found a very open-minded congregation where we are both welcomed and known for ourselves and as a couple, although P comes only occasionally. I believe that what the church teaches is about loving, caring and serving one another and hope that we are doing all three. We may not have a conventional home life but it is a meaningful relationship based on love, trust and commitment, and that is what I would hope for anyone in a partnership.

## ▽ From a bisexual man who is married and has two children.

John, an older man now, remembers kneeling as a teen in church, in deep emotional pain, feeling confused about himself and praying to God. As he knelt there, he imagined other men, just like him, somewhere in the UK, in the USA, and in Asia. He wanted so much to believe that he was not the only person in the world feeling like this inside: that there might be other men across the world feeling the same thing, this inner turmoil. He felt it was rather like having a club foot, but even worse; the source of his anxiety and pain was not physically tangible to others, no one could see his 'difference'.

John grew up in a family culture of strict biblical fundamentalism; there was no place in the family life where an understanding of one's body was encouraged, indeed, there was a constant avoidance of the issue. So, as he grew older, he found that there was no mechanism for giving a name to his experience; instead it became a struggle to survive, psychologically, emotionally, and even physically, because his anxiety became manifest in a deterioration of his physical health. He feared physical intimacy with anyone: male or female. He threw himself into academic life and sought solace in this pursuit of knowledge at university. However, at the age of 22, while on holiday one winter, he fell in love with another man. This initial homosexual attraction (no sex was involved) left him feeling repressed and depressed: he became very ill – and the health problems that resulted from this illness lasted for nearly 20 years.

This repression was relieved temporarily by two wonderful friendships with women, one of whom he ultimately fell in love with, but which ended, leaving him with a deep sense of grief that resulted in him failing his exams at university. He had had his first experience of something 'beyond being gay'. Was he therefore bisexual? At theological college, he sought the support of a therapist, who helped him face the reality of what it meant to be both heterosexual and homosexual; he became more confident and buoyant about what life ahead might bring. He renewed his commitment to university life, and felt more optimistic (although the health problems persisted). Once again, he fell in love with a woman, with whom in many ways he still feels deeply in love. He married her, but the initial happiness this brought came to an end after three years, as he realized that the comfort which he hoped to find within the marriage was not being met. He acknowledged that, in fact, he was not allowing it to be met because what he really wanted was the comfort of a gay relationship; something he was still trying to deny and reject. The marriage brought the joy of two children, but this joy was punctuated by episodes of great distress and stress when he "regressed into male fantasy"; he deeply regrets that his wife may have suffered as he sought to control his tension, not always successfully.

He became obsessed with the meaning of sexual identity, with the problem of his own in particular, to which there seemed to be no answer; it appeared unsolvable. He felt 'finely divided'; he was neither gay nor heterosexual, an extremely painful position; being bisexual one expects the wrath of judgment from all sides. If we are all on a spectrum of sexuality with homosexual at one end and heterosexual at the other, those firmly in the middle - the bisexual people - seem to have felt less able to 'come out' for fear of being accused by the folk at either end of 'wanting it both ways'. The sexual side of his marriage declined: he threw himself into parish life and sought the help of a counsellor

of GLBT people, someone he has now been seeing for many years and who has become an important friend to him: "I owe it to him not to have had a breakdown before this." The marriage is now under stress as he tries to cope with divided loyalties: to his wife and children (who do not know of his inner struggles) and to his own identity. Like the elusive obsessive problem, this remains unresolved, and is the source of continued anxiety and distress for them both. Although they are receiving counselling help, they are finding it difficult to discuss the source of the anxiety with each other, possibly owing to the way they were both brought up in the Christian religion and to unresolved or complicated relationships with their respective parents, where authority and control played so much of a dominant role.

Where does this leave John now? With a deep desire to share his experience with others and his wife: he has lived so much of his life in emotional isolation while trying to do 'what is right' that he hopes, by sharing this 'cameo' of his life, others who might identify with his inner turmoil will find the courage to face the world with integrity. He still considers those men on three different continents, and how their shared experience has led him to this point when he would like to offer up himself and his journey to God's grace. Where this will lead is the unknown journey ahead, but he will travel it knowing that he is not alone, and that he is loved, accepted by his wife, and respected by a much wider community of people than he had previously thought possible.

## ▽ From a transgendered person.

When I was once asked about my first recollection of feeling 'different' I found it difficult to answer, because I always believed I was male. It was not until I was about six that I realised I was not the same as my brothers, physically. I kept thinking that eventually I would turn into a boy because I was so certain I was one. Then I realised I had the wrong body, and it was not going to change.

At the age of eight the abuse began. I lived in a small village with only 13 pupils at the village school; I lived on the outskirts, and after school the others went in one direction and I went in another. The men (there was a ring of four of them, including one that I had known as 'uncle' because he was my dad's friend) would hide somewhere along the tiny roads I had to take home (I now live on a crossroads so that there are always four different ways to get home). It lasted for four years. Then, at puberty, came a feeling of horror when I began developing bits that I literally wanted to get a knife and cut off. So, although I had the body of a female, I have always felt male. Being transgendered has nothing to do with sexuality; you can be a heterosexual, gay or lesbian transgendered person. We sometimes feel in a world of our own - you don't really belong to the heterosexual world, or the lesbian or gay world - you just don't fit!

I often wondered why God had made me like I was, first, a boy in a girl's body and then the four years of terror. I thought it was my fault. I lived in fear, in shame, and in guilt for 40 years before I was able to tell a counsellor. However, I found that, once I could forgive the abusers... (I tried to understand why they did it... what in their childhood had made them like that) then I could forgive anyone. What did help me come to terms with myself and with God as a transgendered person was when a friend said to me: "your body is a

vehicle for your soul and all you have done is to customise it" I was brought up in the church; I knew that God had created this person - me. He had given me this body for some reason, and I never stopped believing in Him or living a Christian life. I never blamed God for anything, but I did wonder "why?"

I am now in my mid-50s, but when I was a teen, I was unable to be open and say what I felt: it would be wrong! I lived two lives: for my parents and their friends and the church, I tried to be a 'good girl'; but I lived another life with another set of friends, wearing a baggy T-shirt and jeans and riding my motorbike, being the male I wanted to be. But it was horrendous - I was living a lie. I told my folks when I was 19. My mum cried and my dad, who had a wonderful sense of humour, said: "put a dress on, darling, and you will feel better!" But they were supportive and understanding. They continued to love me, and my father, in particular was wonderful. He was the most Christ-like man I have ever known, yet he did not consider himself a Christian. I moved to Scotland 30 years ago, and had the operation for a sex change about 5 years ago. It was difficult when I first went home: I had to go into another room when mum had friends, and I could not go to church out of fear of what they would say to my parents. That first Christmas, one brother sent me a Christmas card which said "to my brother" and the other one called me an 'it'.

Everything changed when two things happened in close succession: I was diagnosed with cancer and my father was close to death. My mother began looking at life differently, and began to tell people at church that I was now a son, not a daughter! However, when my father died, I went back home not knowing if I would be allowed to sit at the front of the church with the rest of the family. I was quite prepared to stand at the back, because most folk in the village and at the church still did not know about my sex change and it would be a shock. However, when I got home, I discovered that my family now looked at me...and life... very differently. My other brother finally accepted me for who I am... a heterosexual man, and my mother insisted on having me next to her at my dad's funeral, and I knew then that it would be okay. This year when I go back for Christmas, I will be able to walk around the village without fear, and spend the first Christmas in 30 years in my village church. I will be able to be in the village without needing to hide; either physically or hiding who I am.

At my local church, when I first started going about two years ago, folk were so welcoming. I think a lot of them thought (and probably still think) that I am gay. But at least they think I am a man!! When I was diagnosed with cancer I realised I needed to tell the priest, because I want to have my ashes buried in the Garden of Remembrance. I was terrified! But I need not have been; he and his wife have been wonderful, and I have since been able to tell some of the congregation about being transgendered. I would love to be able to stand up and tell all of them, but I realise that some would probably not understand, and it is perhaps not fair on them. I really would love to take the risk and tell them; possibly, I will when the time is close, so that when I die people will know who I really am, about being abused and being transgendered. The 'deceiving' aspect is so difficult. I want so much to be absolutely open; I am tired of hiding things. I hid so much in my life, that as I am now near death, I would just like to be completely honest. However, in the meantime, I can say that the relief of telling even a few important people was so physically and psychologically comforting.

## ▽ From the mother of a gay son.

I am the mother of a gay son. Most people, I find, still believe that we have a choice about our sexuality, and are very reluctant to accept that we don't. I watched the long and steep depression my son went through, from when it began to dawn on him that he was gay. When he finally told us, we in our complete ignorance handled it very badly and our relationship went through a very difficult and - to our son - hurtful time, but much love and prayers have brought healing. My son's greatest concern is his loneliness, and he immerses himself in his work. He lives in California where he moved with us when still at school, and when we retired home he chose to remain there. He did for some time continue to go to church, but found it difficult to fit in and has lapsed. But I am quite certain God has his hand on him. While my husband was still alive I couldn't have written to you, and even now very few people know that my son is gay. I feel that I as a mother ought to have the courage to 'come out', but at 77 I don't take stress very well and do not have a lot of energy, so I just await God's leading and see where it takes me.

## ▽ From a parent with a daughter in a lesbian relationship.

I was stunned. My young daughter (I will call her R) wrote to say that she was in a relationship with a much older woman and had been, covertly, for some years. They were now going to live together. I knew there had been a friendship developing while R was away from home at University. This lady, whom she had first met in the line of work, was divorced and lonely and kept turning up at the student accommodation. I felt R had been unduly influenced by the status (top of her profession) of the other woman, and the interest and respect she seemed to show in R's opinions of fellow professionals. Next came anger - the woman was stealing my daughter's youth and luring her away from a natural relationship. I remembered an excerpt from the Bible (Matthew 18.6), and I planned in my head how I might assist the Lord in this matter! Such nocturnal planning helped me feel there was a way to help R and allowed me to get to sleep. Of course, there was never going to be an execution of these 'cunning plans'. Had an identical partnering occurred with a girl of my R's own age I would not have had the same reaction. R came to visit on the basis that we would not discuss the relationship, but we always did and it always ended in tears.

My attitude to such relationships has not changed. If they are purely platonic I have no problem, if not, I see them as morally wrong. But, that is a matter for those involved in the relationship and their God, not for me or anyone else. "We all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." After two years, much prayer and a counselling session, I decided (realised might be better) that R did not require my approval, her lifestyle was her own choice. I accepted that; and the best I could offer was through acceptance. I was enabled to love them both as God's children and in that spirit accept them as they are. I accept diversity of sexual practice, but I do not see it as inherent in one's genes. It is my view that we are all the end product of the decisions we have taken throughout our lives. Deciding to adopt such lifestyles is up to the individuals concerned and all will be answerable to the ultimate authority for the sum of their decisions.

I think it is wrong, however, for anyone to insist on, or even seek, approval from their family, friends, community, Church, etc. for their own moral stance. All we have the right

to expect, in my opinion, is loving acceptance. I could not bless or commend such relationships, and those openly involved in them should not allow themselves to be promoted as examples that might influence others to follow their lifestyle. Pride is listed as one of the seven deadly sins: 'gay pride' must surely be even worse!

### ▽ From a heterosexual priest.

I am a priest in the Scottish Episcopal Church in my fifties, a widower with two sons, both married. Neither of them nor any other member of my family is gay. When I was a boy I was scarcely aware of gay people, and the evangelical context in which I first encountered Christianity led me to believe that anything other than 'normal' straight sexuality was deviant and odd. My story is one of an attitude that changed.

As I grew older, I came to recognise the existence of homosexual people, though I was not confronted with the problems that they faced until, some years after my ordination, a young gay man, whom I had prepared for confirmation, came to me to ask what the church taught about homosexuality. He wanted to know how he could reconcile his attraction to other men, which felt entirely natural to him, with what seemed to be a wholly antipathetic teaching about same-sex relationships. By this stage my own views about sexual relationships had been formed by my own experience of the wonder of a committed and mutual relationship within marriage, which I believed (and still believe) echoes the loving commitment of God to humanity, seen above all in the life and death and risen life of Jesus. When I tried to find reasons why this should only apply to heterosexual relationships, I couldn't. The notion, which I tried to apply, that straight sex was 'natural' and gay sex was not seemed (and seems) absurd, because there was much 'natural' sex which simply does not square up to the picture of a committed relationship which I believe to be central to what I would call 'Christ-like' sex. From my point of view, 'normal' casual sex and even rape fits the description of 'natural', in that it is driven by heterosexual urges, but is wholly 'un-Christ-like'; whereas a committed relationship between two men or two women could, and, as I discovered later, did echo God's love for us. The question of sexuality seemed almost wholly irrelevant.

I think, looking back from where I am now, that what began the change in my attitude was a theological struggle, triggered by a pastoral need. From that time on, a number of experiences confirmed the insight I had been given, two of which have been crucial for me. One was the courage of my late wife, who in the throes of a fatal illness was so incensed by the exclusion which she saw gay people experiencing in the Christian churches that, though an entirely 'straight' mother of two, she took a very public role in trying to get the church to accept the reality of the love that two people of the same sex could have for one another. The second was the devoted affection and support of two women in a lesbian relationship, both members of an Episcopalian congregation, for my wife as she struggled with her illness, and for me since her death; and the deep desire of these two that their love for one another should be recognised for what it was through a public exchange of vows before God and in church. 'You will know them by their fruits' (Matthew 7.16-20). The wish of these two women for a service of blessing led me, and the congregation of which I am a part, to think seriously and carefully about the issue of 'same-sex marriages'. A statement was approved by the vestry of the congregation,

which included the observation that "the service of marriage takes place within the terms of the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977, which requires that one partner must have been born a male and the other a female"; and that therefore "a marriage service between partners of the same sex is not possible, and services of commitment for same-sex couples do not impart any change of legal status. It does not follow that the commitment between such a same-sex couple is any less than that between a heterosexual couple who marry." Until there is a change in the civil law of Scotland, and in the church's understanding of the place of procreation within marriage, it will not be possible for the blessing of same-sex unions to be termed 'marriage'; but I have no doubt either of the depth of commitment between many same-sex partners, or of the place of such people as are Christians within the church. I am happy to say that there are several gay men and women within the congregation to which I belong, and I am immensely grateful for their presence.

### ▽ From the mother of a gay son.

It was the year 1999 and our sons were both at Newcastle University. Our younger son James had just embarked on an Engineering Course and Tom our elder son was in his second year studying medical physics. It was the end of October when we went down to Newcastle for a day visit, took the boys out for lunch and then went for a walk. James and his Dad soon were way ahead, nearly out of sight, with Tom and I content to amble along behind.

Tom suddenly remarked, "It's good to have time to talk – all summer's been so busy what with my summer job..." I don't know what it was about the tone in which this was said that made me stop walking and turn towards him, giving him my fullest attention. "Was there anything in particular we should talk about?" I enquired. "I'm gay," he said, the words rushing with urgency and great conviction from him. I remember how even more alert every part of me suddenly became – so focused on this beloved person telling me something that was precious to him, revealing something about himself that was so essential to who he was and utterly vulnerable in so doing! I acted instinctively, without any planning, reflection or thought – no time for that. I hugged him tightly. "I love you for who you are" were the words that came to me. By his disclosure, a lot began to make sense – his unusual sensitivity and gentleness, his interest in homemaking skills such as cookery and flower arranging, and the way that he had always been devoid of that streak of macho characteristics which teenage boys in particular are so keen to display. These made him different from his brother and other contemporaries but previously I had dismissed it as his attempts not to compete with or rival his rather macho sibling. I reasoned that he wanted to make his mark as an individual.

The rest of the day passed. Tom did not tell his Dad – but our other son then dropped the bombshell that he was abandoning his course and would have to leave University for a year, returning at a later date to pursue another course. Two crises in the one day – for that's how I viewed what had happened at that moment. I cried all the way home in the car and Andrew, my husband, thought that it was because James was leaving university, but it was for Tom and for ourselves as a family that I was weeping. The cosy family picture was disrupted by images of AIDS and HIV sufferers in my mind, and imagining

how our precious son might succumb and be a part of that horror. I felt hugely protective and yet so very helpless and alone; looking back now, I am amazed that never for a moment did I doubt or question that Tom was gay. I wrote to Tom as soon as I got home, again telling him how much we all as a family loved him and asking him to come home and tell his Dad, as we didn't have secrets between us. This he did the following weekend and Andrew's response was much like mine.

Over the next few weeks, we went through a wide variety of emotions. I was so fearful for Tom's physical safety. I worried that his good nature and open manner would be exploited by older men – that he would be used and discarded – that he would be physically harmed and emotionally scarred. Andrew and I wanted to know more about homosexuality; what 'caused' it in particular. Were we to blame in how we had reared our children? As we earnestly sought information, newspaper items on the subject were suddenly jumping off the page at us. We came to realise how greatly folk suffer emotionally in coming to terms with their sexuality and were appalled at the high rates of attempted suicide that were recorded. I spent a long time wondering how I should "be" as mother of a gay son. That now seems strange to me, but then it was a reality in that new situation that I found myself in. I was aware that we must not sweep it under the carpet and pretend this disclosure had not occurred – that would be both damaging and disrespectful of Tom. However, there was not yet within me the capacity to celebrate difference for there was with me a sense of bereavement - that Tom whom I had always found it so easy to picture as a devoted Dad playing happily with his children - would not have this opportunity. How could Tom face that sort of deprivation, I wondered.

Another adjustment was dealing with who to tell (after first asking Tom's permission). You have to be as certain as you can be that disclosure is appropriate – for once told you cannot rescind. A person who helped me at this time was a religious brother, whom I knew and bumped into in a bookshop. I found myself blurting out to him that I was trying to come to terms with having a son who was gay and I didn't yet know how to be parent to a gay child. He said without hesitation that I could ask his mother! The offer was also made that I have coffee with him sometime in a "gay café" so that I could see that other gay people were ordinary folk without horns!

The first boyfriend that Tom brought to stay looked so similar to Tom that they might have been clones! I was touched by the fact that this lad had told his mother but could not tell his lorry driver father. He lived in a small village in the North of England where his mother was very involved in the local church. Her whole life centred on the work that she did in this small church community. She lived a terrified life for fear that her son's secret would emerge and that she would be censured for having a gay son and ostracised from the church. As far as the church that we were then attending was concerned, we too kept quiet as we lived in a small town and anything said might have spread to inappropriate ears, which could have caused Tom embarrassment at the very least. It was sometimes tempting to say something for gay issues were beginning to be on the agenda and there were opportunities to speak out. Our then bishop was Richard Holloway, who encouraged honest debate. Looking back I am now very relieved that I said nothing, for I don't think that I would have changed any minds. Later on that same church invested in Bibles for the back of each chair. Something was said about getting back to Bible principles; one can just imagine what was really meant by that!

And now we have found a new church home and a welcoming church family where each person is valued and loved just as they are - as fully and as unconditionally as we are able - for we have yet to perfect this - and all have prejudices whether we are aware of it or not. Looking back over the years that have passed since we learnt that Tom was gay, we can marvel at the learning that has come our way in terms of the value and beauty of variation and of difference and this has so much enriched us that we are tremendously grateful to have been given this opportunity. We have one gay son and we have one heterosexual son; we adore both, as we do our two daughters.

## Questions to Aid Discussion in Local Groups

### ▽ Is Homophobia a sort of apartheid?

*In a sermon at Southwark Cathedral in Feb. 2004 Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, “The Jesus I worship is not likely to collaborate with those who vilify and persecute an already oppressed minority. I myself could not have opposed the injustice of penalizing people for something about which they could do nothing – their race – and then have kept quiet as women were being penalized for something they could do nothing about – their gender, and hence my support, inter alia, for the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate. And equally, I could not myself keep quiet whilst people were being penalized for something about which they could do nothing, their sexuality. For it is so improbable that any sane, normal person would deliberately choose a lifestyle exposing him or her to so much vilification, opprobrium and physical abuse, even death. To discriminate against our sisters and brothers who are lesbian or gay on grounds of their sexual orientation for me is as totally unacceptable and unjust as Apartheid ever was.”*

Do you agree? Or disagree?

Would you be willing to add “sexual orientation” to the list of ‘distinctions’ in Day Seven?

If not, why not?

Do you believe it is acceptable for faith organisations (i.e., churches) to exclude themselves (by appealing to Parliament) from current national equal opportunities and non-discrimination legislation?

### ▽ Is the Church ‘Good News’ for gay people?

*Homophobia kills: statistics tell us that 1 in 5 young people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) attempt suicide, often as a result of homophobic bullying. Christian homophobia in which young LGB people are told that they are sinners, but can be ‘cured’ through counselling, prayer, and asking for forgiveness can also be very painful as well as dangerous, because the very integrity of their humanity is being denied them. An Anglican priest is quoted as saying: “I am vulnerable in a way that touches the very heart of my being, and this can be distressing. There is always a fear that I may be victimised within the very institution that ought to be able to accept me as I am for God’s sake.”*

Day Eight calls on us to “fight against all such injustice in the name of Christ, in whom there can be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for in him all are one...”

Is the Church a place of danger for LGB people?

How do we respond to this as Tertiaries and as Christians?

Are you prepared to speak out for justice, as Day 9 calls on us to do?

### ▽ Would Jesus bless gay partnerships?

*“How then can I live as I do and still believe in the Bible? If homosexual orientation as we know it was unknown to the writers and editors of the Scriptures, then it is quite possible to argue that a permanent, faithful, committed relationship between two men or two women is compatible with the teaching of the Bible. God and his Truth are not confined within the covers of the Bible, and if the Holy Spirit guides us not just to read the*

*words of scripture, but also to read between the lines, then it is reasonable to see homosexual partnerships as part of God’s purpose for some people.” (Quoted from *The Other Way?*)*

Do you agree or disagree? Why?

If you agree, then is it just to deny the priesthood or the episcopacy to LGB people who are living in a permanent, faithful, committed relationship?

### ▽ Are there a variety of Sexual Orientations?

*“People in the ancient world took same-sex activity for granted. Where they forbade it, they forbade it for reasons other than “nature” or “God’s plan.” They forbade it for cleanliness or purity reasons or for procreation and population reasons, or because they frowned on sexual pleasure itself. The idea that heterosexuality is the whole of God’s plan and that same-sex conduct therefore is sinful is a much later idea. Today those ideas are being refuted. Scientific evidence increasingly confirms that sexual orientation is a continuum of sexual orientations: From heterosexuality through bisexuality to homosexuality.” (Quoted from *Claiming the Promise*)*

What do you think about these statements?

What is “unnatural” or “natural”? Who determines what this means?

### ▽ Can the Church support gay partnerships?

*Richard Holloway in *Dancing on the Edge* says, “Even if we believe that life-long monogamous marriage is the best option available, it must also be obvious to anyone who thinks about the matter that it is not universally achievable, so we must try to avoid making the best the enemy of the good... is there any practical reason why the Church cannot assist in strengthening the relationship (heterosexual or homosexual) of a couple living together by devising liturgies of support and commitment that do not pledge faithfulness till death but do commit the couple to fidelity as long as the relationship endures?”*

What would you like to see the Church doing in this respect?

Do you think the Church should take a leading role in affirming strong and committed relationships of all types?

### ▽ Is it about ‘sex’ or about ‘true love’?

*“Christians, and society at large, need to be grateful to homosexuals for helping them to ask more questions about the meaning of “love” in intimate relationships. They have helped us to move forward in understanding this profound word more deeply, reaching to the very depths of our identity and going well beyond pleasure and procreation.” (Jack Dominian, a Roman Catholic marriage specialist, in *The Tablet*)*

Do you think that sexuality and spirituality can or should be separated?

Why do Christians find it acceptable to talk about spirituality, and so difficult to talk about sexuality?

## Glossary

from *“Claiming the Promise: An Ecumenical Welcoming Bible Study Resource on Homosexuality”* by Mary Jo Osterman

**Bisexuality:** a sexual orientation; part of one’s sexual identity with capacity to be attracted to either sex.

**Gay man:** one who self-identifies as attracted to men.

**Gender identity:** a component of sexual identity; our basic conception of ourselves as being either male or female; includes ‘transgendered’ and ‘transsexual’ persons (whose gender identities somehow do not match their biological sex or their assigned gender role and who ‘cross dress’ or seek surgery to change gender).

**Heterosexuality:** a sexual orientation, part of one’s sexual identity; being attracted toward the other sex in one’s sexual desires.

**Homosexuality:** a sexual orientation, part of one’s sexual identity; being attracted to the same sex in one’s sexual desires.

**Lesbian woman:** one who self-identifies as attracted to women.

**Reconciliation:** a changed relationship for the better between persons or groups who formerly were enemies or at odds with each other

**Sexual identity:** the basic sexual make-up of a person; involves three separate yet interrelated components: gender identity, gender role, and sexual orientation.

**Sexual orientation:** a component of sexual identity; indicates to what degree we are potentially sexually attracted to the same sex or the other sex; implies affectional orientation; for some, i.e. holistic way of “being.”

**Sexual preference;** sometimes used to indicate one has a “choice” rather than an orientation; often used narrowly and negatively to refer to person’s same-sex activities, rarely to describe other-sex choices; offensive, especially if used instead of “sexual orientation” to deny genetic or biological factors of sexual attraction.

## Organisations and Support Groups

### Changing Attitude – Church of England and Scottish Episcopal Church

A network of people, gay and straight, lay and ordained working for the full affirmation of lesbian and gay Christians within the Anglican Communion [www.changingattitude.org](http://www.changingattitude.org)  
[www.changingattitudescotland.org.uk](http://www.changingattitudescotland.org.uk)

### Courage

An evangelical Christian organisation for gay and lesbian Christians who are seeking a safe place of friendship in which to reconcile their faith and sexuality and grow towards Christian maturity and for their partners and friends, parents and other family members [www.courage.org.uk](http://www.courage.org.uk)

### The Evangelical Fellowship for Lesbian and Gay Christians

A group for Christians from an evangelical background. Started in 1979 it is a very integrated group and is unusual in having equal numbers of lesbians and gay men amongst its membership. [www.eflgc.org.uk](http://www.eflgc.org.uk)

### Inclusive Church

An Anglican network of over 9000 individuals, church councils, and organisations that have signed up to Inclusive Church’s Statement of Belief. It is a grass roots network with a campaigning edge, open to anyone who shares our vision of an inclusive church. [www.inclusivechurch.net](http://www.inclusivechurch.net)

### Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (LGCM)

[www.lgcm.org.uk](http://www.lgcm.org.uk)

### Equality Network

A network that campaigns for human rights for LGBT people in Scotland. [www.equality-network.org](http://www.equality-network.org)

### Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (FFLAG):

[www.fflag.org.uk](http://www.fflag.org.uk)

**Parents Enquiry Scotland** (affiliated to FFLAG) Support for parents and families of LGBT children e-mail: [parents enquiry@hotmail.com](mailto:parents enquiry@hotmail.com) Central Line: 0131 556 6047 (Anne)

**Stonewall Lobby Group Ltd.** works to achieve full legal rights for lesbians and gay men in the UK by providing information and support for legislators. [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk)

Stonewall also have a project offering support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender young people in the age group 13 – 25 Confidential Youthline: 0845 113 0005



## Some Books and Reference Material

(In Alphabetical Order)

**A Church at War**, Stephen Bates, I B Tauris 2004

**A Question of Truth: Christianity and Homosexuality** Gareth Moore OP, Continuum 2003

**Claiming the Promise: An Ecumenical Welcoming Bible study Resource on Homosexuality**, Mary Jo Osterman.

Order from Reconciling Congregation Program, 3801 N. Keeler Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60641 USA

**Dictionary of Theology and Society**, P A B Clarke and A Linzey, eds. London: Routledge  
*[on Class, Clergy, Homophobia, Same Sex Relations, Sexuality]*

**Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual**, Michael Ford, DLT 2004

**Face to Face – Gay and Lesbian Clergy on Holiness and Life Together**,  
Jeffrey Heskins, SCM 2005

**Gays and the Future of Anglicanism**,  
Andrew Linzey and Richard Kirker (eds) John Hunt 2005

**Has Anglicanism a Future? A Response to the Windsor Report**,  
Andrew Linzey, LGCM 2005

**Homosexuality and the Church of England**, Andrew Goddard, Grove Books 2004

**Issues in Human Sexuality**, House of Bishops, Church House Publishing 1991

**Liberating Sex – a Christian Sexual Theology**, Adrian Thatcher, SPCK 1993

**Living in Sin? A Bishop rethinks Human Sexuality**, John Spong, Harper and Row 1988

**Love Rekindled: Practising Hospitality**, Jim Cotter, Cairns Publications, 1996

**Pleasure, Pain & Passion: Some perspectives on sexuality and spirituality**,  
Jim Cotter, Cairns Publications, 1993.

**Some Issues in Human Sexuality**,  
A Working Party of the House of Bishops, Church House Publications 2003  
and

**Companion to Some Issues in Human Sexuality**,  
Joanna Cox and Martin Davie, Church House Publishing 2003

**Strangers and Friends –a new exploration of homosexuality and the Bible**,  
Michael Vasey, Hodder & Stoughton 1995

**The Other Way** - Anglican Gay and Lesbian Journeys, Colin Coward (ed.), London 1998

**Reluctant Journey**. George Hopper. [www.reluctantjourney.co.uk](http://www.reluctantjourney.co.uk)  
from the website: This is not a flashy site with bells and whistles. It simply tells the  
profound true story of my being led by God from homophobia to Christian love for  
homosexuals, Christians especially. The website is in the form of a biography which can  
be read online or downloaded free of charge.

**[www.socresonline.org.uk/8/4/contents.html](http://www.socresonline.org.uk/8/4/contents.html)** for the following articles:  
Sexuality in the Church: Toward Sociology of the Bible by John Brewer A Divergence of  
Views: Attitude Change and the Religious Crisis over Homosexuality by Alasdair Crockett  
and David Voas The Christian Right and Homophobic Discourse: a Response to  
'Evidence' that Lesbian and Gay Parenting Damages Children by Stephen Hicks Saints  
and Sinners: The Role of Conservative Christian Pressure Groups in the Christian Gay  
Debate in the UK by Stephen Hunt