

# **OUR STORIES/YOUR STORY**



**A RESOURCE**

BY THE

**WORKING GROUP ON GAYS AND LESBIANS AND THE  
CHURCH**

OF THE

**HUMAN RIGHTS UNIT**

OF THE

**ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA**

**1990**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	iii
Introduction	v
Stories	1
Exodus	2
No Longer Welcome	6
Reflections of a Gay Anglican Priest	10
Created in God's Image	12
Growing Up Gay	16
Manhood and Self-Image	20
And a Little Child Shall Lead Them	24
The Other View	25
Ordinary Grace	28
More Questions for Consideration	33
Where to now?	35
Appendix A: Reading List	37
Appendix B: Terms of Reference	41
Appendix C: Glossary	43

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## About the Cover: the Pink Triangle

In the death camps of the Third Reich, just as Jews were required to wear yellow stars of David as identifying badges, homosexual men wore pink triangles and lesbians wore black triangles. Today, the pink triangle is used by the gay and lesbian community as a symbol of proud self-identification, at least partially in solidarity and remembrance of the victims of the holocaust.



# PREFACE

For the past several years, the Human Rights Unit of the Anglican Church of Canada has been working on a set of Human Rights Principles for the Anglican Church of Canada. The Unit presented the Principles to General Synod in Winnipeg in 1986. However, because of lack of time, they were referred by Synod to the National Executive Council. When the National Executive Council discussed them in 1987, it referred them to the House of Bishops. Since 1987, the Human Rights Unit and the House of Bishops have continued to discuss the Principles and the Unit has made further revisions.

In the period after 1987, it became apparent to the Human Rights Unit that one provision of the Principles, the inclusion of sexual orientation as a non-discriminatory ground, was particularly controversial and was contributing to the difficulty of getting the Principles adopted. Canadian Anglicans' unfamiliarity and/or discomfort with the experience of gays and lesbians in church was causing many to question whether sexual orientation belonged in the church's human rights principles.

Committed to retaining sexual orientation in the Principles, in 1987 the Human Rights Unit formed a Working Group on Gays and Lesbians and the Church. The purpose of the Working Group was to present to the Anglican Church of Canada in a more deliberate way the experience of lesbians and gay men in the church. The Working Group was made up of people from a variety of backgrounds, both women and men, lay and ordained, one of whom was to be a member of the Human Rights Unit. The Working Group has met three times a year since 1987. The Working Group reports to the Human Rights Unit which in turn reports to the Program Committee of General Synod.

As those who are committed to furthering an understanding and acceptance of all of God's people within and beyond the church, members of the Working Group wish to thank the Human Rights Unit for making the work of the group possible and for the publication of this resource.



# INTRODUCTION

## Community Building Through Story-telling

One of the most enjoyable aspects of membership in the Working Group has been in sharing the gifts that come from developing a sense of community. From the start we believed it was essential for our work to get to know one another and to openly share our personal stories. We took time at each meeting to hear from a few members of the group, listening for ways that God was speaking through their individual journeys.

The simplicity of the story-telling process was profound. Not only did we come to know and appreciate who we are as individual group members, we discovered yet again the power of an incarnational approach to life that each of us share as Christians. God came into human history through Jesus Christ and we continue to find God in our personal lives today. Our stories gave shape to our beliefs, and our experiences provided the substance that transformed a discussion of issues into a meeting of "real people" committed to seeking God's presence in the world.

## Stories of the Gay and Lesbian Experience

It became apparent to us that storytelling was a very powerful way of presenting the issues concerning the church and sexual orientation: human relationships, human rights, ethics, theology, inclusion and exclusion, the Biblical witness, etc. We decided to gather a collection of stories we could offer as a resource to help Canadian Anglicans better understand the experience of lesbians and gay men in the church and, at the same time, reflect on their own experience of sexuality.

The storytellers included in this collection are women, men, lay, clergy, gay and straight. All have experienced a significant relationship with both God and the church, and all have come to an awareness of how their sexuality has been shaped and developed within and beyond this relationship. Some have chosen to use their real names while most, for fear of losing employment or out of concern for family members, have chosen to use a pseudonym. This underscores the distinctiveness of the lesbian and gay experience - one is never fully out of the closet; gays and lesbians are forced to compromise their own integrity and dignity for fear of others.

## How to Use This Resource

Accompanying each story is a set of questions written to facilitate personal reflection and group discussion. A blank space has been provided after each set

of questions. We invite the reader to use this as a workspace for immediate feelings and thoughts, for a response to the questions, or to make notes for further discussion. We encourage the reader to make use of the many informed resources already available and suggested in the Reading List. In addition we have included some suggestions for further reflection, discussion, and action in the section called "Where to Now?" A copy of the Terms of Reference for the Working Group clarifies our mandate, and the Glossary contains a selection of words commonly used in reference to lesbian and gay sexuality.

We see this resource as part of a process, a beginning for some, and a further support to others who are already familiar with many of the issues raised in the following stories. The reader will find themes and issues in these stories that are common to each one of us as we seek an experience of love, acceptance, and compassion with other human beings and with a power greater than ourselves. There will also be opportunities to listen to the unique experiences of fear, grief, loneliness, anger, pain, joy, acceptance, courage, love, and integrity, known to many lesbians and gay men within and beyond the Christian community. We hope that this collection will encourage personal awareness along with a concern for the issues currently facing all of the people of God today.

Seeing God's presence in creation and in the human form of Jesus, and bearing witness to that presence, is essential to our faith and to our experience of the Word becoming flesh. We offer this booklet as part of this living process that is as old as our Judeo-Christian tradition. This resource provides many opportunities for the reader to better understand the issues of lesbian and gay sexuality and to meet others face-to-face who are seeking to live in harmony within God's creation.

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# STORIES

# EXODUS: COMING OUT AS A FAITH JOURNEY

Sandy's story

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"Jesus loves me, this I know,  
For the Bible tells me so. . ."

I have loved this hymn all of my life because of its reassurance that God loves me. During my late teens and early twenties it was especially comforting because I hated myself so much. Most of the time I believed that I was total filth. This was not because of anything I did or said, but because of who I was - a gay man.

Raised as a devout medium-low Anglican, I was subject to strong evangelical influence. My maternal grandmother was Baptist, and my mother was with the Brethren before she was married. I was deeply affected by the oft-repeated penitential elements of the Book of Common Prayer. (The Prayer of Humble Access was at least as important to me as the Consecration: "we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table").

At seventeen I became involved with a fundamentalist protestant youth group. It was drilled into me that I was unworthy and that even my best was valueless. God could not tolerate imperfection, and only the Blood of the Lamb could atone for my sin. There is no problem with all that; it is quite orthodox as far as it goes. However, there was too much emphasis on self-degradation as opposed to recognition of the incredible magnitude of the mercy of God. I also bought into the distorted theory of justification which claims that God loves me only because I am looked at through Jesus-coloured glasses. This *really* means that God doesn't love *me*, as I am unlovable. The Parent loves Jesus, and I get filtered out,

according to this view. This is in sharp contrast to the theory that asserts that there is a real transformation within me, where the grace of God changes my state of being, not just my legal status. Being under the influence of the former doctrine profoundly affected my view of myself. This included all of the components of my being: my hopes, abilities, emotions, and my sexual orientation. Although I was certain about my orientation, I thought of it as a defect that could be rooted out or smothered with enough prayer and self-abasement, and I did not act on it.

I kept praying to be a different person, and God answered in a way I was not expecting. This is usually the case, I have found. In university, I became one of the leaders in a rather extreme fundamentalist protestant prayer group, and at the same time attended a high church Anglican parish. In my second year I joined a Catholic Charismatic group, which combined pentecostalism with catholic spirituality. There I began to see that truth is not as simple as I had thought. The realization came that protestant fundamentalism was not necessarily the only authentic Christian spirituality. However, it was there that I felt required to stand up and claim "healing" for my homosexuality (as if it were a disease or a wicked choice). No one had known my "dark secret", but they all congratulated me on my "deliverance". In reality, I experienced no change at all.

After three years of university, I felt a call to publicly serve God, so I enrolled in the M.Div. program of a low church Anglican seminary. During the two years I was there, I

learned a great deal of Church history and theology, and started reading the scriptures in deeper and more comprehensive ways. When a professor used the term "bibliolatry", I suddenly recognized that the Word of God is Jesus, not simply the text of the bible as interpreted by "authority". My well-ordered (if chokingly rigid) world view was being shaken apart. I truly felt called to ministry, but all the while I kept feeling more and more like a fraud. I was not able to accept that Jesus had redeemed and sanctified all of me. He had not just issued an "ADMIT ONE" ticket because of my so-called better parts, overlooking or excluding the rest of what makes me me.

I am driven by the need to be whole and to integrate my life. To be authentic in whatever I believe and do is essential. There was tremendous stress because of the apparently irreconcilable differences between my orientation and what I believed my faith dictated. Finally I blew a gasket. I had to leave the seminary after an immobilizing depression which included two suicide attempts. Some of the other students were very much ministers of grace, but the staff and clergy were useless. I could not "confess" what was really at the heart of the matter except to my pastoral counselling professor, who dismissed this issue, saying that I was asexual, not homosexual, since I was not sexually active. This was a very harmful attitude. Sexuality is more than what you do and who you do it with. It is part of who you *are*, how you understand yourself, and how you relate to other people even in non-sexual situations.

My Creator refused to let me go, although I wanted God to abandon me and let me be annihilated. I still remember how, when I had given in to despair, a solid conviction of the Great Lover's persistence came over me. (I rather resented it at the time, I so much wanted to escape the realities of my existence).

Several years were needed for me to heal and grow and become able to rejoice in the knowledge of the love of God. The healing process included coming out to myself. That is, I had to accept that my orientation was toward members of my own sex. What's more, that was the way I was put together. It

was not a product of my own volition. I did have a choice, but not whether to be gay or straight. My choice was whether to be gay and sick or gay and healthy. I have now learned to celebrate my sexuality as a gift from God. (As with all gifts from God, it has to be used with love and responsibility; all gifts can be misused, but that does not make the gift any less good). To be able to do this, I look at what the Bible is really telling me. Jesus loves me! God is with me! God will never forsake me! The new commandment is to love one another as Christ has loved us!

A few selected special people in the church have aided me enormously on my continuing journey. Most helpful were a couple of organizations from gay and lesbian Christians and friends. These are *Integrity* (Anglican) and *Dignity* (Roman Catholic). Worshiping and giving thanks to God together with others like me has been most uplifting. Through these organizations, I found many supportive friends, both gay and straight, clergy and lay, who helped me to see the image of God when I look in a mirror, and when I look at others who differ from me. Also, I have become reconciled with living in exile, on a journey through an unfriendly wilderness, on the way to the promised land. In this journey, this struggle, my self-satisfaction and complacency are repeatedly challenged so that I can work with and help others who are marginalized.

Eventually, I continued with further theological studies, but no longer with the goal of ordination. This has not changed. The current definitions of the system do not include me. I am in a committed relationship that I will not renounce or hide. This is an ongoing painful issue in my dealings with the Anglican Church of Canada, which officially refuses to acknowledge that our relationship can be blessed by God (although we did receive a liturgical Blessing of Commitment in the Episcopal Church). While ordination is currently out of the question, I feel that I have a prophetic ministry, to be both an example to others and a target of homophobia. I love the church, but part of that love must express itself through being uncomfortably visible when it may be more tasteful (and is certainly

easier) to stay in the closet.

God is greater than anything I can imagine. I must constantly seek God's will and strive to make the most of the talents given me. If I do, God will make the most of what I have to offer and will not refuse me. If I ever do fail, the good news is that the Holy Spirit is able to be my correction, my strength, my comfort, and my guide.

When asked if he believed in infant baptism, Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) answered, "Believe in it? Hell, I've *seen* it!" Just so, there is really no question as to whether it is possible to be gay and Christian. I am. Others may attempt to disallow God's love and care for me, or to discredit my faith in God, but, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." (2Tim 1.12b)

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### **POINTS TO PONDER:**

1. What were the things that struck you most about Sandy's story?
2. Where do you see the persistent presence of God in Sandy's story? In your own life?
3. How did Sandy's feelings about his sexuality change throughout this story? How has this change come about?
4. "Sexuality is more than what you do and who you do it with." Reflect on this statement from the story.
5. How is your sexuality a gift from God?

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### **WORKSPACE/NOTES:**

(Notes)

# NO LONGER WELCOME

Kathy's story

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Once upon a time I was "normal". I was married and had two children and owned a house and went to church... All that changed when I came out as a lesbian eight years ago.

I grew up in a family that was very active in a local church. My parents were involved in many activities including teaching Sunday school, singing in the choir, leading the youth group and sitting on the board. They were very committed to the church and I was very much a part of that community. My parents, my two brothers, my sister and I were a fixture in the front pew of the church every Sunday and I was involved in many different organized activities in that congregation.

I maintained a close relationship with the church until I graduated from university and moved away from home. During my teenage years I was privileged to have a pastor who challenged me and the congregation to see Christianity as a call to justice, and the church as a place to initiate social, economic and political change, bringing the Christian message alive in the world.

I was peripherally connected to the church from the time I was twenty until after I was married and had children. When my first child was born, my partner and I decided that since our experience of the church had been so central to our growing up years, it was an important community for our children to be part of. I went through some classes in order to decide if I could reaffirm my membership in the church. I decided that I could, realizing even then that I often felt on the outside fringe of the church.

I became very involved in the struggles

of the church; as a growing feminist I worked to support social justice concerns, served on national committees, and fought sexist attitudes and language within the church. I had a strong sense that I was part of a caring community. I also felt excluded by the male dominated language and imagery in the church.

Eight years ago I met and fell in love with a woman. It was at least two years later that I actually identified myself as a lesbian (as opposed to a woman who just happened to love another woman). I went through a painful separation and divorce. I am grateful that my ex-husband and I have maintained a friendship and that my sexuality has not been used against me with our children. I feel supported by him and our children.

My mother died before I came out and I regret that I have not been able to share with her who I am now. When I came out to my father he was also dealing with the news that my husband and I would be separating. He immediately had several responses: "I love you anyway, you're my daughter", "What have I done wrong? Everything's fallen apart since your mother died.", "I've always thought your sister was more sexual than you." I am grateful that dad has been able to struggle with the "issue" of homosexuality and that he has been able to support me in his way. He has "come out" for himself by talking about me in his congregation - the one he grew up in. The wider church community has been engrossed in a vicious battle around the ordination of lesbians and gays and dad has had a lot of courage and taken risks in making his own views public. I have also felt supported by the rest of my immediate family, all of whom have found their own unique ways of

coming to terms with my sexuality.

I have not been involved in a church on any regular basis since I came out. One time dad suggested that I become part of a congregation and that after I have been there and people know me, I could tell some people I was lesbian. I am not interested in being part of any church where I cannot be open about who I am and where I am not accepted for who I am.

I remember one conversation with my ex-husband who was living with a woman at the time. He said he felt uncomfortable going to church with her because he was not married and felt that he was not accepted. I understand that and realized that he was lucky; at least he had the option of getting married and gaining "official" recognition of and acceptance for his relationship. There was no such

option for me in that particular church.

I experienced the church as very accepting when I was married and I would want that acceptance if I were involved in the church again. I certainly experience acceptance from some individuals who were part of my church community and I do not feel acceptance from the church as a whole. I feel anger and grief over the struggle in the church now. I feel a lot of pain when I hear people condemning me for who I am and condemning many other people that I know and love - people who have given and continue to give so much to the church.

I believe I have grown spiritually in the past eight years and am grateful for God's presence in my life. But I no longer have a sense of the church being my community and I grieve that loss.

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### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. What were the things that struck you most about Kathy's story?
2. What would you grieve if you lost your church as a community?
3. Is your parish a place where you can openly share who you are and what you are currently experiencing in your life? Are there things in your life that you feel you need to hide from your parish friends?
4. How does the language and imagery used in your parish include some while excluding others? How can you and your parish contribute to the use of language and imagery that reflects the experience of all people: women, men, gay, straight, young, old, and those from other cultures and backgrounds?
5. How would you welcome Kathy into your community?

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### WORKSPACE/NOTES:

**(Notes)**



**(Notes)**

# REFLECTIONS OF A GAY ANGLICAN PRIEST

Bob's story

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Even in childhood I remember being sexually attracted to my fellow males. In adolescence I dated girls but it did not seem to "click". In retrospect, I see that the people I was most deeply attracted to were all males. In university I had a small circle of friends, both men and women; in particular some of the male relationships were quite close but in the sixties it was very difficult and threatening to express them sexually. In graduate school I was finally forced to admit to myself that I was gay; it was a very stressful period and this self-realization contributed to my failure in graduate school. There seemed to be nothing I could do about it; my parents were supportive and I got on with life. I had already begun to develop an interest in theology and ministry. To me, my gay sexuality was a given and I did not think it should interfere with my desire to study theology or be ordained. Unfortunately my bishop felt otherwise and the whole process was delayed several years.

When I finally went to theological college, my gay sexuality did not seem to be much of an issue. I was not sexually active but had hopes that at some point a relationship might emerge. Eventually, other relationships - teaching, ministry, friendship, scholarship, etc. - came to have much meaning for me. I was aware of the sexual character of some of the friendships but felt that I should respect other people where they were; so no full sexual partnership emerged.

I have spent my life in celibacy though with many affectionate relationships with both men and women. This has given me a freedom for a broad range of friendships across many cultures which has been very satisfying. But it has also left me with some loneliness and occasional depression. I am aware that I would have the support of many friends if I were to be in a gay relationship but I find that the expectations of the church and society make it difficult to find a partner. I expect that being a priest also makes things more difficult; structures of society and my own socialization do not help; nor does the uncertainty of how parts of the church might respond. I want whatever I do in this area to be able to be presented to God at the altar. Therefore, I am cautious; I feel like Germain Greer - better no sex than bad sex.

So I find my situation not unlike that of single heterosexual people in their mid-forties. Finding a partner is difficult, one regrets mistakes and missed opportunities of the past but still has some hope that a partnership may emerge. If this does not happen, I will survive. But except for people who have a positive vocation to celibacy, I do not think sexual isolation is a good thing; so I shall be a bit sad that things have not gone as well as I think they ought to have. However, I am aware that others have more serious difficulties and deeper pain than mine. Therefore, I keep trying to move ahead cheerfully on a broad range of justice issues in the world.

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## POINTS TO PONDER:

1. What were the things that struck you most about Bob's story?

2. How would you (or do you) feel as a single person in your mid-forties in your parish?
3. "But except for people who have a positive vocation to celibacy, I do not think sexual isolation is a good thing". Reflect on this comment.
4. Bob has not felt safe enough to use his real name. How would you feel if you could not put your name to a statement about your own life about which you are not ashamed?

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**WORKSPACE/NOTES:**

# CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE

## Jeanne's story

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When I was very young we had visitors in our house quite often. Cousins, aunts and uncles, friends and neighbours from our street. Our family went to church. My parents had parties sometimes. And although I can't recall when or why, I remember that the visits and the parties and the going to church stopped.

There were angry words in the distance, rumours in the school yard, and strange phone calls from strange men. My mother cried a lot. And there was silence. Silence that spoke of something too horrible to put into words.

I learned from my family that it was better to hide and pretend than to acknowledge feelings and current events. As with many families we lived with a "no talk" rule. Nothing discussed within the house should go beyond. And my recollection is that there was little shared among us that could have been taken elsewhere anyway.

I was the youngest of three children. And being the youngest and the only girl I was to be protected. My eldest brother was gay and struggled with his sexuality from an early age. Although I often knew he was "in trouble" and unhappy I didn't fully understand why until I was a teenager.

When my parents were finally able to talk more openly about my brother being gay they referred to "it" as "his problem". I felt confused. I heard their words and I heard their distress and yet nothing inside allowed me to share their belief that being gay was a problem. At least not in the way they understood it to be.

With time the messages became more direct: "Don't tell anyone about your brother's problem." This is our secret and if anyone finds out there will be serious consequences.

I knew my parents were hurting and so was my brother. In addition to the burden of guilt and responsibility they carried the pain of fear and isolation. Only in recent years have I come to know the effects of that burden on our life as a family and even on myself as the one they tried to protect.

My brother moved out long before I actually knew he was gay. I missed him and I missed coming to know him during those years of hiding and silence. I also missed his friendship and potential support as I made some discoveries of my own. Although I had a steady boyfriend throughout high school I realized in my later teen years that I was attracted to others girls and women. At seventeen I met a woman who became my first lover. We were close friends and "it" felt so right to be together. I didn't tell anyone. I couldn't. I didn't want to have a "problem". And even though I didn't experience loving another person as a problem I had internalized more powerful messages than my own experience.

I felt isolated and scared and also very happy to share so much closeness and comfort with another human being. How could anything so wonderful be so wrong in other people's eyes, and even in my own?

One day my father discovered my lover and me hugging and kissing in my room. He ordered her out of the house. He didn't want my mother to know. He told me, "it would kill her". When he asked me what I thought I was

doing all I could think and say was, "loving another person". That was unacceptable to him and there was no understanding between us. The next day he told me of a dream he had the night before: He was walking the streets, looking for me. He had a gun and was going to put me out of my misery.

Neither one of us spoke of that "incident" ever again. He was now a part of my secret and in our silence we agreed to keep it from everyone around us.

I left home soon after to go to university. I had chosen to study in a city far enough away from my family of origin that I could enjoy some independence and freedom. I now had the opportunity to be myself and yet I discovered that the need for secrecy and hiding had followed me and was a part of who I was. I hated the isolation and loneliness, and the fear of being found out was too threatening.

My lover and I went to different universities and stopped being lovers in the first year apart. We were and still are friends.

I was living in a women's residence and by the end of my first year I "fell in love" with a sister resident. The next year we shared a room and later an apartment. We shared the fear of being exposed. She was from a "good Roman Catholic family" and was sure they would think she was going straight to hell if they knew. We had very few friends and no place we could be open as a couple or as two individuals who could freely share their experiences and beliefs and feelings. It wasn't a supportive environment for a healthy, growing relationship. We parted after three years.

I received a great deal from this relationship. Very significantly I received nurturing and support for my spiritual development. Before we met I had explored different churches, wanting to find the sense of community and belonging I had missed throughout my life. I was attracted to a god that stood with the poor and the oppressed, who offered acceptance to all believers, and who was reflected in the creation of all human beings. My friend and lover encouraged my faith and my relationship with a particular church com-

munity.

It was to the priest of this community that I turned when our relationship was in crisis. To have reached out in this way was a significant step and I was grateful for his willingness to be of support. And similar to the process of many relationships, I believe it was too late and our decision to part had already been made.

I grieved the ending of that relationship in the midst of intense loneliness.

I hated the secrecy. I hated my own fear and dishonesty. And I couldn't see a way out.

The more I became involved in the church and had thoughts about ordination the more uncomfortable I became with the idea of revealing who I was. It was clear to me that I had a lot to lose if anyone found out. And if keeping secrets was painful I at least found some strange comfort in the similarities between my family of origin and the church.

I felt called to be a priest and I believed that being created in the image of god included who I was as a lesbian. If I kept that secret I could serve as I believed god wanted me to.

I now more clearly and honestly understand the language of denial for I can hear myself wanting to say, "I never intentionally denied who I was, nor did I purposely try to mislead other people." A friend of mine says that it's possible to be truthful and not honest. I can best explain what this means to me by saying I'm grateful that no one in the church ever asked me if I was a lesbian. And while I'm grateful I never had to lie outright I know that evasion and secrecy meant I was able to maintain a vague sense of truthfulness while not being entirely honest.

I served as a priest for four years. Over that time I "came out" to a few close friends. What a relief to have at least one small corner of my life where I could be who I was: a lesbian *and* all the other expressions of who god created me to be. And even with more support than I had ever known I still felt alone and

isolated. I longed to share my story and my spiritual journey, not from my head or from theological texts but from my own experience of god's presence in my life. I believe this is what we're called to do as members of the christian community. And many times I encouraged others to do what I was afraid to do myself.

Meeting my present partner eight years ago was a turning point. We met at a social justice/urban training workshop. My feelings for her were immediate and powerful.

I lived and learned with members of the group for over a week without sharing some of my own experience as a lesbian. And finally, during a scheduled discussion about lesbian and gay issues, I came out (filled with fear of rejection and open to any number of terrible consequences).

It was a first for me. I experienced a tremendous amount of acceptance and relief. I was a whole person. No one died because I shared the truth. I was accepted for who I was. I experienced the good news and I wanted more.

I knew I didn't want to return to hiding or secrecy or trying to second guess where and when I could wholly be myself. I was grateful for the new gift of freedom and I felt sad about letting go of working within the church.

I haven't regretted that decision and I feel at peace with myself. And at times I still feel sad and angry with the lack of freedom and acceptance within the church.

I could have stayed. My choices would have been a vow of celibacy or "keeping a low profile". Either way I believe I would be in conflict with myself, with god, and all my beliefs about good news and new life.

Perhaps someday the church won't ask me (or anyone else) to make the choice between my vocation and who I believe god has created me to be.

I used to feel pain and sadness because I couldn't celebrate who I was and who I shared life and love with. And now I feel very grateful to share this story, because I've come to know great joy and peace in acknowledging who I am, and in sharing acceptance and love with those around me.

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## **POINTS TO PONDER:**

1. What were the things that struck you most about Jeanne's story?
2. You discover that an immediate member of your family is gay or lesbian. How do you respond? You discover that a member of your church family is gay or lesbian. How do you respond?
3. Where in this story do you see that secrecy has been destructive? Where have you found sharing a secret liberating?
4. "Perhaps someday the church won't ask me (or anyone else) to make the choice between my vocation and who I believe god has created me to be." Reflect on this statement.
5. Jeanne's image of God includes her being a lesbian. Does your image of God include all of who you are?

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**WORKSPACE/NOTES:**

# GROWING UP GAY

Emilio's story

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A friend once asked me who the most influential person in my life had been. She went on to describe her grandfather's effect on her as she grew up. After some thought, I had to concede that it wasn't a person, event or object that had shaped me the most, but rather my sexuality.

Although I did not learn the words "homosexual" or "gay" until I was in Grade 8, I knew from a very early age that I was different. Even in my earliest memories, all my feelings of sexual affection and attraction were centred on men. My interests seemed to be more consistent with the feminine world I experienced - I enjoyed reading and playing house to sports and "rough 'n tumble" play. Somehow I knew instinctively that all this was "wrong", but it became a certainty when in grade school I was teased and harassed, sometimes even bullied by other children who noticed the difference and treated it as a weakness. I consequently had few friends, was very self-conscious and timid, and probably rejected any friendly advances out of fear.

It was during my early grade school years that I made a friend who would accompany me for many years. Incited by my Roman Catholic training, I began to pray daily to Jesus; using my own words, I spoke to him about the people and events of each day. I cried out my despair and loneliness; I confided in him the one secret I kept until I was 22 years old - that I was indeed gay and friendless in a hostile world.

When I was 13 years old and in Grade 8, I accidentally stumbled across a *Time* issue dedicated to Gay Power. The articles left me shocked and dismayed - the men in the pic-

tures did not look like the men to which I was attracted - I couldn't identify with their militant stance and "loose" appearance. I felt threatened and more alone than ever. My prayers began to intensify but they were prayers which begged for deliverance from my "problem", plea-bargaining for a cure.

The solace which I derived from the church continued through my high school years. I became a good student and read a lot. I felt pressure from my family to be like the other boys but rejection from my peers. I began to study men around me and copied the way they walked, the way they held their books and dressed. I developed crushes on some of my male teachers and fellow students, but they were mild in comparison to the severe bouts of unrequited love that I was to endure during my university years.

My other daydreams focused on freedom - finding a place where I was loved, accepted and desired by some mythical, wonderful man. Consequently, I applied to universities as far away as possible from my home town. The need to escape my suffocating environment was intense and, when I finally spent my first day in Montreal, in the fall of my first year of university, it seemed to me like my first day of freedom.

Unfortunately, my shame and guilt were too far ingrained to allow me to come out right away. My secrecy continued, and with it the feelings of rejection, despair, fear and self-loathing intensified and became insupportable. My mood swings puzzled my friends and led to frequent deep depressions. I had developed a deep devotion to Jesus and an important prayer life. He was the only confi-



dant with whom I could share my thoughts and innermost feelings.

Finally, at the age of 22 years, I made an appointment with a psychiatrist at the Student Health Service. He was the first person to whom I admitted being gay. Unfortunately, he was not a person whom I liked and that first visit was also my last. But the experience proved not to be devastating and within days, I spoke to my parish priest. I was very lucky to find in him someone who understood the significance of my admission, and who offered me unequivocal comfort and support. Very shortly thereafter, I told friends, I dated, I joined various gay groups. During those five years I felt close to God at some times, and at other times I felt quite distant.

For the past ten years I have been in a committed and monogamous relationship. I met my friend at Dignity, a Catholic Gay Organization. We both strongly felt the hand of God drawing us together, and as our relationship grew, we knew we were building something unique and beautiful for God. I can't say that I yet accept myself fully or that I am always "out of the closet". Learning to know myself and accept my limitations seems like a lifelong process. But I thank God for the strength and courage that I have been able to access in myself and I am grateful for a loving partnership in which I continue to grow and feel His love daily.

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### **POINTS TO PONDER:**

1. What were the things that struck you most about Emilio's story?
2. What did conformity mean to Emilio in his high school days? What did conformity mean to you in your high school days? What does conformity mean to you in your church community today?
3. How do you relate with Emilio's experience of Jesus in this story?
4. How do you feel about Emilio's having found a partner?
5. How would you want your priest to respond if someone confided that they were lesbian or gay?

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### **WORKSPACE/NOTES:**

**(Notes)**

**(Notes)**

# MANHOOD AND SELF-IMAGE

## George's story

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I have always weighed very little and have been slight of frame. When I went off to university in the late sixties, the half-starved look of bohemian life was more fashionable. But in the rural farming community in which I grew up, what was valued in men was that they could stack hay from sunup to sundown. Success for an adolescent, therefore, meant demonstrating one's athletic abilities on the football field or basketball court.

I, of course, was not good at any competitive sports, although I tried out for all the teams. I was nicknamed "Skinny". One of my most embarrassing moments occurred in sixth grade when a group of girls my age chased me down in the playground and wrestled me to the ground and sat on me. I was all the more ashamed at the tears I shed in my anger.

I was just beginning to experience my first feelings of sexual desire when a great blow occurred to my self-confidence. I was riding my bicycle when I hit a bump and my face collided with my handlebars. I chipped two of my front teeth so badly that the roots were exposed. The dentist recommended that nothing be done for several years for fear that any drilling done too quickly might damage the root.

So I reached the dating age feeling incredibly unattractive, like Dracula in need of a transfusion. I dated very little, finding the anxiety about possible rejection too great to risk. I developed some compensating behaviours, finally ending up drunk at the prom when I felt that my date was ignoring me. In our tiny student body, such behaviour did not go unnoticed. I was disciplined by the

school by being prohibited from participating in any extra-curricular activities.

Facing a year without any social life at all, even as insufficient as it had been to that point, made it attractive to me to switch to another school. That school was a prestigious, church-run, private school and I jumped at the chance to leave the rural confines of my life. I hoped to make a new start. My teeth were ready to be fixed. I was randy and ready to make an impression on an entirely new crowd who would not know me as I had been.

But when it came time for my teeth to be capped, my incisors had grown. With the new caps on my front teeth, it was quite clear that I was buck-toothed. I sobbed in the car outside the dentist's office after receiving the crushing news of two years of orthodontic work just as I was about to enter a new school and then university.

At the new school my search for peer acceptance became so obvious that it left me open for ridicule. Uniforms, drill, and the army cadet corps training that were an integral part of the school's programme also included the traditional hazing of new boys. As one of the few new boys in my class, I was singled out for a year-long torment of physical assault, personal degradation, and ridicule. Dormitory living meant that night after night I would find my bed and my possessions torn or soiled by urine. The faculty seemed unwilling or powerless to intervene. My image of myself was so low and so much of my energy was devoted to my personal survival that I dated no one from the neighbouring girl's school that year. And you can imagine how the other boys treated me when I took my sister to the

seniors' dance rather than be the only one to go dateless.

I toughed the year out. And that word "tough" perhaps best expresses what came out of that year for me. I developed the sense that toughness could mean endurance and resilience and not just muscular strength. I remember being thrashed by one of my fellow students as I continued to spit in his face until he had collapsed in exhaustion, weeping as hard as I in frustration at not being able to break me.

But what that also meant was that my sense of "manhood" was essentially the same as it had been from my youngest years when my male cousins teased me mercilessly because I could not compete with them on the playground. The shame that I had felt at being bested in a wrestling match with a group of girls had been long conditioned into me by countless cues that boys were more physically able. I could now cope with my inabilities in attaining this measure of "maleness" by substituting a different scale. But my ideal of men as rugged and self-sufficient remained the same.

Hence, I survived the year but I was completely out of touch with how badly I had been wounded. I had plugged up my exterior pride but all sorts of forces trapped inside me were driving me from within in ways in which I was unaware. How else can I explain that the very summer after I graduated from school I led a group of students on another campus to dish out many of the same torments as I had received on the man we had singled out as effeminate.

I knew it was wrong at the time, but I could not help myself. I could not take revenge on my attackers so I took it on someone I could make my target. And deep down beneath was the insecurity that if it were not him it could be me. That was exactly what happened the following winter in my first year in university when the attacks I had planned were turned against me by those I had wanted to lead. I remember the sense of betrayal I felt as I learned that someone of whom I thought as one of my oldest friends turned out to be part of the conspiracy against me. It was

years later that he came out of the closet. I appreciated how closely akin his fears were to mine, that we would be singled out as unmasculine, and how we had both been driven by those fears to persecute others.

I drifted onto the fringes of campus life. Against the mainstream "fraternity rushes" and homecoming games was developing a counterculture that identified itself with the label of "freaks" and "rejects". It was anti-establishment and anti-war and anti-authority. It deliberately broke the petty campus rules of *in loco parentis*, by flaunting cohabitation of men and women in dormitories that were to have been exclusively segregated by sex, by political acts of theatre and gesture, by smoking dope and dropping acid.

Two aspects of this opposition especially appealed to me. First, it came to focus on the presence of military recruiters and trainers on campus. I began to recognize that the military's characterization of manhood as aggressiveness and competitiveness was a distortion of what true humanity might mean. Much of the anger that I had chosen to direct at scapegoats now had as its target oppressions that seemed much more the real causes of my frustrations and anxieties.

Secondly, this opposition was faith-based. The religious existentialists I was reading at the time and the Christian left's leadership of the anti-war movement on my campus began together to form a coherent view of the world for me. I began to see the Vietnam War, racism and the suppression of the student movement as outcomes of individual alienation and of futile attempts to deal with personal incompleteness by controlling and manipulating others. I could link that cosmology with my own personal story of others' tyranny over me and of my own attempts to gain direction over my life and its variables. By seeking to exert my authority over the most fickle factors in my environment, other human beings, I would be overlooking God's gracious fulfillment of us according to the divine plan.

But being able to name those strands which were influencing my life did not really

help me begin to unravel them. I continued to be driven by these forces; I could not find the hooks where the strings were attached deep inside me by inculcation into a culture where rugged self-individuation was valued above all. That I could now hunt and fish and survive for periods in the bush only reinforced that I was now a man who could live in a "man's world".

I would have never exposed to another the loneliness and isolation I felt playing this role. Longing for the sense of completion that I could only find in an intimate relationship with another person, my hurting and heartache drove me, after incidents of rejection, into hurting some women. I could not understand why I did these things when I was acutely aware of how directly they paralleled my own bad experiences. I was not deliberately vengeful but my anger seemed to dominate my actions despite myself.

I am too ashamed of my gay-bashing and cruelty to women to talk about them in

more detail than I have here. I feel deeply the culpability and even criminality of these actions. But they are a part of my personal history for me now to try to understand. The insights I now have into these actions come from those who have patiently committed their time to me, especially the one with whom I am now in a primary relationship.

If there has been one key to my salvation from the destructive behaviour in which I was caught (drugs, psychological abuse of myself and others, drivenness), it has been the unlocking of those parts of me I would have once rejected as womanish. By these I mean sensitivity, vulnerability, tears, yielding to others intimate contact with my own inner life. At a time when baseball and hockey stars weep openly on TV, it may mean that these qualities are now more acceptable in men than they once were, But I still find them to be enormously difficult to reconcile with the concept of manhood that I have carried since my youth.

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## POINTS TO PONDER

1. What were the things that struck you most about George's story?
2. How have you been hurt by sex role expectations? How do sex role expectations lead to persecution of gays and women?
3. How can the church community contribute to changing the attitudes that promote violence against gays and women?
4. What kinds of traumas have you faced with your sexual identity?
5. How does your self-image affect your sexual relationships with others?

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## WORKSPACE/NOTES:

**(Notes)**

# AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM

Joyce Barnett's story

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One year anniversary. . .

a year too exciting to stop and carefully plan - falling in love, end of term papers, talking all night long, exams, coming out to friends and family, graduation, parish assignment, moving, learning to be an assistant curate, learning to live together, weddings, preaching, funerals, trying to remember names of parishioners, always anxiety and worry about being found out, hating the lying, even when the lying was simply not telling everything.

The mask I put on every morning to go out the door to work was getting harder and harder to take off in the evening. Alison was getting the same distance that the parish was. The closet was closing in and it would eventually crush our relationship. As if I had a wasting disease of the spirit, I was less and less able to preach, to speak the truth in love, because I had to hide from the congregation as I stood before them. I wanted to preach of liberation and transformation while my life was fraught with fear and real danger. I was caught in a dilemma of believing that *the personal is political* in a situation in which sharing the personal was too risky.

Feeling committed and very much in love but sharing an eerie undercurrent of anticipation and despair, Alison and I went away for a week. During our time away we skied and walked and talked and talked. We struggled with the tension between our joy and delight in each other and our grief at how much we stood to lose. We had a sense that freedom and justice were possible in our lives if only we could find our way.

What people think of as the far out, wacky, radical, most crazy act of our lives was and is the most central and most sane thing that we have done. We decided to have a child, that child I had always wanted, the child we both wanted, one day, someday, but within that particular span of years allotted to women to have children.

We discovered a way to live our lives with integrity and wholeness through deciding to have a baby. We would do what was healthy for a child. It is not healthy for a child to grow up amid lies and secrecy, therefore we would no longer live that way. It is too risky for a child if her parents' source of income might be cut off at any moment. We would find income sources that were not at risk due to our sexual orientation. What's good for our baby is good for us. We had lost track of how to decide what was good for us, so we felt relieved and thankful that we had been able to find another way to measure, to decide, to make choices.

We came home and began to make plans to leave parish ministry. By the time our daughter was born over a year later, we were employed outside the church and were members of a parish with whom we could be open and honest. We regained our sense of ourselves and how to make decisions about our life in that free air outside the closet.

I feel able to speak and preach only now that I am inhibited from functioning as an ordained person in the church. I grieve and rage at that oppression and homophobia. I am profoundly grateful for our child who has shown us, by her basic human needs, how it was that Alison and I might find our own lives.



*I asked Alison to help edit my story which led to her writing her own.*

# THE OTHER VIEW

Alison Kemper's story

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We fell in love while studying and working for the Anglican Church of Canada. We spent a year and a bit trying to live and work in the church while sorting out life together. It was a wild time of unlimited possibility, the possibility of new love. It was a time of great fear, the fear of the retribution which the church exacts from her own sons and daughters. We would go off for a holiday or a long Sunday drive and drag ourselves back filled with the fear that we would have both lost our jobs and our home and that our furniture would be piled up on the driveway in the rain. It was a time of gaining it all by having each other and seeing the loss of our livelihoods, our vocations, our positions, our respectability, our professions.

It began as a time of hope in each other, a time when together we could do anything for the people of God. When our dreams of succeeding in the church evaporated, we did not abandon hope. Joyce and I had been employed by the Diocese of Toronto as deacons in parishes. In 1985, we resigned our positions, and in 1986 we were inhibited from functioning as deacons, an interdiction which remains in effect. What happened to us was one of numerous cases of rough justice handed out in a system with homophobia and misogyny at its roots, in its trunk and through all of its leaves and flowers. Hope and love, however, are far stronger than either the perks of ordination or the bigotry and vindictive power of the church.

We chose life, and choosing life led us away from almost all of the church. We put down roots and became a family. We bought a house and conceived a child. One little pocket in the church, Holy Trinity parish, chose to have us, love us, and support us. Much of the church has spoken ill of us, bishops have cursed us with their empty threats, others have forgotten us. But we go on raising a child in a loving family while working to make justice, witnessing to the fact that our lives have an integrity, a challenge, a meaning. We both work in the community, go to home-school association meetings and violin lessons, and raise an active daughter.

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## POINTS TO PONDER:

1. What were the things that struck you most about Joyce's story? About Alison's story?
2. Reflect on times in your life in which you have been called on to grow in ways that were risky or painful. How have you experienced the presence of God at those times?
3. Non-traditional families are increasingly common. What do you believe is essential to providing a healthy environment for a child to grow up in?
4. Does your parish provide a supportive home for all forms of family? How

can you help be part of a nurturing faith environment?

5. Joyce and Alison both express in their own way the call of God to ministry, and their pain at being unable to exercise that ministry within the structure of the church. How would you and your parish respond to people in their situation?

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**WORKSPACE/NOTES:**

**(Notes)**

# ORDINARY GRACE: SOME EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF A GAY PRIEST

David's story

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One of the things that strikes me quite forcibly about my life, and in particular my years as a priest, is how commonplace most of it is. That's not an expression of regret, nor one of boredom. It's just that I have a great deal in common with many other gay priests of my generation and, probably, with many people who fall into none of those categories. In that, I think, lies the value of my telling some of my life story to you. Gay people - especially isolated ones - can get a lot of nurturing from hearing about other gay lives; it makes us feel less alone. And if a non-gay person, perhaps someone who has not knowingly met a gay man or a lesbian, is reading this, perhaps you'll see that my life, like most gay and lesbian lives, encompasses situations and feelings which, though different, will not seem completely alien to other people.

I was ordained deacon and then priest in the early eighties. This was before the ordination of gays was a very big issue in the Canadian church and before AIDS brought sexual lifestyle issues before us in a way that could not be ignored. It is remarkable to think how very little was said about that sort of thing, even then. I had told many people, whom I knew would be supportive, about my orientation; these included my bishop, my professors in theology college, some members of the chapel congregation, and my classmates (with the exception of one whom I did not trust with the information). There were also significant people I did not tell: most of the people I shared housing with, my parents, and the general run of church people and officials,

including my ACPO committee (they never asked).

After my ordination to the diaconate, which my bishop, who was wonderfully supportive to me throughout my training, consented to without imposing any condition of sexual abstinence on me, I became a curate in my home town. My circle of support immediately became much smaller. I had, of course, moved from where I had come out as a gay person and built up some supports to a work situation where many of the key figures, including the rector, seemed distant and conservative; these were not people that I sensed I could be open with. Had I been more mature at the time, I could undoubtedly have found support there; in fact, after I had left St. Paul's, I did "come out" to a woman whom I first met there and found that it deepened a growing friendship between us. But I was still very young and afraid; it was my first real job and I never came out to a soul the entire time I was there. As a result I was very lonely, lacking both sexual friendship and a circle of intimates with whom I could be myself.

Therefore, when the time for my curacy was drawing to a close, I decided I had to move to a larger city and made arrangements to do some further training in chaplaincy work there. This move to the bigger centre is one which I think many gay people are virtually forced into, not because we like cities, but simply because, especially when we are coming to terms with ourselves, we need people who will affirm us. The visible gay and gay-

positive community in larger centres is tremendously attractive and reassuring to a gay man or lesbian whose self-esteem is still a little fragile. Within six weeks after I had moved to the city, I met a man who became first a steady dating partner and later my lover. Yes, that's pretty sudden! I had never before felt free to date anyone, so this was my first substantial sexual relationship. I was fortunate that Don turned out to be the person that he did - the first word that comes to people's lips when they want to describe his character is "decent". I would add to that intelligent, creative and hard-working. We're no longer together - I broke up with him after a couple of years; but I still count him among my closest friends and he seems still to feel close to me as well.

My relationship with the church in my city since moving here has not been uncomfortable but I do feel marginalized. I do good work at the hospital, and am accepted, though many people know I'm gay. I have had trouble with the senior chaplain, who feels I might become an embarrassment, but the community generally has been quite supportive and has prevented him from taking action against me. His hostility towards me is no more than a minor frustration; of greater concern to me is the negative effect of his inability to deal with staff upon our department and on the quality of our care for the patients.

In the diocese, I am not accepted as one of the "regular" clergy. I think many non-parish clergy feel some of this, but when - as in the case of a gay priest who is not closeted - the life of a parish priest is not an open option for you, the sense of alienation is greater. In my case, the parish where I am honorary assistant has done much to ease the pain of that feeling of being an outsider. It is a small, downtown parish with an extensive ministry to the poor. It is a place where I can be myself, and in which few people care what my sexual orientation is. When I need help, it is there. The rector is the centre of my very significant support network.

When I broke up with Don, I met another man whom I became very close to. Like Don, he was decent, intelligent and good-hearted. He was also from the same part of the country

that I come from; and unlike Don, he was highly articulate, in particular with his feelings, which was something I hungered for. In fact, sometimes Jim was a little too pointed with how he felt! He was also quite ambitious, which I admired. When I first met him he was working on an internship program at a local art gallery as part of his training for museum work. We had a wonderful summer together, and continued to keep in touch that fall after he left to take on the final year of his training.

Late that fall, Jim began to complain of shortness of breath. The doctor diagnosed a mycoplasmic infection, and we both heaved a sigh of relief; it wasn't you-know-what. But after what initially seemed to be a recovery with some medication and a rest over the Christmas vacation, Jim got worse again. On January 30, 1987, Jim was diagnosed with PCP, one of the marker diseases for AIDS.

This isn't a story about AIDS, so I won't go into great length describing the agonizing process of Jim's illness and death within eleven months of his diagnosis. Some of the comforts in the situation were that Jim was at least able to work, a little bit, for a short time, at his chosen profession. He did most of the work for his final year and was hired that summer on contract by the director of a local art gallery. At that time we were able to live together for a while - that was another comfort. Then there was the wonderful support from his family. When he was very sick in the hospital, his mother and a sister came out and stayed with us for an extended period and helped and cheered both of us. And finally, in November of that year, Jim chose to spend the last weeks of his life at home, with his mom caring for him. For me, that meant letting him go, and it was hard, but I think he made the right choice. I loved him, but they had loved him all his life and he knew few people besides me here in the city.

The last comfort was that I was able to see him and tell him I loved him before he died; there was an air strike on, and I had to take the bus, but I got there the same evening that he died. He recognized me, and I was sitting with him when he breathed his last. I think he may have held on, so that we could see

each other.

There were, of course, some awful things, too. When Jim first moved to the city the summer when he was sick, he was attacked by a very tall, strong man while we were walking together - thrown to the ground and hit three or four times for no apparent reason. I screamed my head off for the police; they didn't come till long afterward, but it attracted enough people's attention that the man didn't keep on. Of course, this frightened Jim terribly, and he never liked it here from then on.

Perhaps the worst thing for me was my parents' reaction. I had little choice but to tell them why I was planning on spending every holiday I could get in Jim's home town; and I have never been much at telling lies. Their reaction was righteous horror, expressed in the most vicious and dreadful terms, and an ultimatum: it's him or us. Again, I had no real choice; even if I had been willing under other circumstances to be sexually abstinent to please my parents, nothing could have been more clearly and shockingly immoral than abandoning Jim in his situation. It wasn't until a year afterwards that my parents and I had some contact again but we have never discussed my relationship with Jim or my gayness. Jim's family really became my family throughout that whole bad time, and they remain family to me. When people have loved you through a time like that, they always remain important people in your life.

As for my natural family, we still have some things to work on. I'm able to talk to my mom now fairly normally, though my dad still doesn't seem able to relax and realize I'm the same person he used to enjoy talking to. This experience has demonstrated to me how good and how awful it can be when gays and

lesbians talk with the church. Both sets of parents are devoutly Christian; three of the four people concerned have deep reservations about homosexuality. But what matters most is not whether there are reservations or not; it is showing love, perhaps despite reservations. If love is there, if I'm accepted and there's a safe place for me to be, then we can deal with reservations. The disaster is when the church says to a gay person, at some level, "It's me or your loved one, make your choice."

In the year and a half since Jim died, I, of course, have grieved, sometimes very painfully. Along with that pain eventually there came healing and the capacity to go on with life. I think that now I feel more compassion for other people's losses of loved ones, since I've felt some of that pain myself. In the last six months or so I've had a sense of putting myself back together again - not quite the same self as before 1987, but perhaps in some ways a better one.

In so many ways this is such an ordinary story. It's about friendship and loneliness, about moving, about losing a loved one, about work, about parents. It's also a story of faith. Through all that I've talked about here, and the many areas of my life that I haven't talked about, there has been a sense for me of God leading on towards new and abundant life - into joy, into wholeness, into reconciliation. Sometimes the path to these things has led to pain. But the pain and the risk are worth enduring, and they aren't the main thing. The main thing is rebirth, and being open to it. And now, before I turn this into a sermon, I'd better close off. God bless!

P.S. The events here are all real, but I've thought it best to change names and other details, to protect the vulnerable.

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## POINTS TO PONDER:

1. What were the things that struck you most about David's story?
2. What is ordinary about this story? What is not?

3. How would you support a friend with AIDS? How would your parish support a couple confronted by AIDS?
4. Have you ever had a grief experience similar to that of David?
5. How would you feel if one of your parish clergy were to "come out of the closet"?
6. "If love is there, if I'm accepted and there's a safe place for me to be, then we can deal with reservations [about homosexuality]." Reflect on this statement.

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**WORKSPACE/NOTES:**

**(Notes)**



# **MORE QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

1. Most of the authors of these stories have felt the need to conceal their identities to protect their jobs and/or their families. How does the church contribute to people's need to stay in the closet?
2. Who are the people in your life who have taught you what you know about sexuality/homosexuality? How have you learned what you know?
3. "All people are full members of creation." Reflect on this in relation to the ordination of lesbians and gay men.
4. How would you feel if you were going to lose your job because of your family status?
5. How could you as an individual, and member of a parish, welcome gays and lesbians within your community?
6. As a parent of a gay son or daughter would you (or do you) feel comfortable talking about your child with other members of the parish? Why?
7. What are the concerns, issues, and feelings that you think most urgently need to be addressed with respect to lesbians and gay men in the church?

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**WORKSPACE/NOTES:**

**(Notes)**

# WHERE TO NOW?

It is our hope that in reading, reflecting on, and discussing the stories in this booklet the reader will experience only one small part of an ongoing process of understanding, acceptance, and growth. We offer the following suggestions as ways of continuing this process.

## As an individual you can:

1. Share this booklet and discuss your reflections with another member of your parish.
2. Take time to read some of the resources suggested in the annotated reading list.
3. Initiate a parish study program on lesbians and gay men within the church.
4. Encourage your parish council/vestry to look at ways of becoming a more welcoming community.
5. Explore ways of getting involved in issues and activities involving gays and lesbians in your community (AIDS support, lesbian and gay pride celebrations, human rights).
6. Write or share your own story of how you became aware of your own sexuality in the midst of your personal journey of faith.
7. Share your response to this resource, or share your story with:  
The Working Group for Lesbians and Gays and the Church,  
c/o Ministries in Church and Society,  
600 Jarvis Street,  
Toronto, Ontario  
M4Y 2J6

## As a parish you can:

1. Give frequent visible and audible clues to openness by including lesbian and gay concerns in sermons, liturgies, social action, and notices of special events or group meetings on bulletin boards.
2. Invite lesbian and gay speakers to talk about their lives and spiritual journeys with different parish groups.

3. Encourage study groups on such topics as lesbian and gay rights, the struggle of other religious groups over lesbian and gay issues, Biblical and theological perspectives, AIDS, and redefining our understanding of family and intimacy.
4. Provide books in the church library such as *Is the Homosexual My Neighbour?*
5. Have your parish services regularly listed in a local gay newspaper.
6. Plan one Sunday worship a year to focus on homophobia or lesbian and gay concerns. This could be coordinated with lesbian and gay pride celebrations often taking place at the end of June.
7. Examine your parish's attitudes towards ordination and employment regarding both sexual orientation and AIDS.
8. Explore cooperation with local lesbian and gay support groups.
9. Examine your parish's attitudes towards images of family. Do these images include single parent families, extended families, lesbian and gay families, and individuals who by choice or circumstance live on their own?
10. Initiate a task force or committee to develop ideas for ongoing activity within the life of the parish. Continue to find ways of putting a human face on homosexuality.

# APPENDIX A:

## Reading List

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Batchelor, Edward (ed.) *Homosexuality and Ethics* (The Pilgrim Press, New York, 1980)

With Nugent's *Challenge to Love*, one of the best collections of diverse essays. Contributions by Aquinas (I), Baum, Barth, Curran, Pittenger, Nelson, Diocese of Michigan Report, Barnhouse, among others. Batchelor is an Episcopalian priest and chaplain working in New York.

Boswell, John. *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980)

One of the landmarks of the literature. A scholarly study, in which Boswell shows that intolerance towards homosexuality within the Church is a rather recent phenomenon, which dates only from the thirteenth century.

Brown, Judith C. *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1986)

Clark, Don. *The New Loving Someone Gay* (New American Library, New York)

Targeted at both gay and straight people who have recently discovered that they themselves or a friend or relative is gay or lesbian, this is a basic practical introduction to loving someone gay.

Curb, Rosemary, and Nancy Monahan (eds.) *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking the Silence* (Naiad Press, 1985)

A collection of autobiographical stories of lesbians who had been members of various religious orders.

Denman, Rose Mary. *Let My People In: A Lesbian Minister Tells of Her Struggles to Live Openly and Maintain Her Ministry* (William Morrow and Company, Inc., New York, 1990)

An intimate self-portrait of a woman called to ministry.

Fairchild, Betty, and Nancy Hayward. *Now That You Know: What Every Parent Should Know About Homosexuality* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1979)

This book contains basic information and support for parents and family of

lesbians or gay men, to help answer questions and concerns.

Glaser, Chris. *Come Home! Reclaiming Spirituality and Community as Gay Men and Lesbians* (Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1990)

Chris writes and speaks with genuine insight about about how his/our day-to-day experiences inform and illuminate the stories and parables of scripture.

Glaser, Chris. *Uncommon Calling* (Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1988)

A gay man's struggle to serve the church and his rejection for ordination by the United Presbyterian Church.

Heyward, Carter. *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1989)

One of the best feminist theologians, Heyward says that love IS justice: to love is the act of making justice. She expands the meaning of erotic beyond simply the sexual.

Heyward, Carter. *Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality and Liberation* (The Pilgrim Press, New York, 1984)

A collection of essays, sermons, lectures, and liturgical poetry This is theology in the context of radical feminist commitment. Heyward was one of the first eleven women to be ordained to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church in the USA.

McNeill, John J. *The Church and the Homosexual* (Kansas City, 1976; reprinted by Next Year Publications, New York, 1985)

Another landmark of the literature. John McNeill is an openly gay Roman Catholic priest and psychoanalyst who has shown tremendous courage, for several years, in the face of institutional disapproval of his views. He was expelled from the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) in 1987 for his continued refusal to remain silent.

Nelson, James B. *Embodiment. An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1978)

An excellent work reaffirming the importance of the body as a good, important part of the humanity Christ came to redeem (as a human with a body). A key theme is the rejection of the artificial mind-body dualism inherited from Greek philosophy.

Nugent, Robert (ed.) *A Challenge to Love. Gay and Lesbian Catholics in the Church* (Crossroads, New York, 1984)

Provides societal, biblical-theological, pastoral, and vocational perspectives. Contributions by Sr. Jeannine Gramick, G. Baum, J. McNeill, D. Maguire, Mary E. Hunt, M. Fox, among others.

Pittenger, Norman. *Time for Consent. A Christian's Approach to Homosexuality*

(SCM Press, 1976)

Pittenger is a Church of England priest and theologian who has lectured extensively in the USA and Canada, particularly Toronto.

Rafkin, Louise (ed.) *Different Daughters: A Book by Mothers of Lesbians* (Cleis Press, Pittsburgh, 1987)

Writing about family, community, religion and neighbourhoods, among other topics, the authors raise the essential questions mothers of lesbians confront.

Scanzoni, Letha and Virginia Mollenkott. *Is the Homosexual My Neighbour?* (Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1978)

A gay/lesbian-positive study written from a conservative scriptural perspective. Probably the best and most constructive contribution from that side of the issue, it deals extensively with the scriptural texts often used to justify the church's attitude toward homosexuals.

Spong, John Shelby. *Living in Sin? A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* (Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1988)

John Spong is the Episcopalian Bishop of Newark. This work deals with the church's attitude toward many forms of non-traditional relationships, from a practical point of view. It takes into account scripture, psychology, and sociology. Spong takes scripture very seriously, but from a modern/liberal methodology. He makes several concrete (if controversial) recommendations, including blessing of gay and lesbian relationships.

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**WORKSPACE/NOTES:**

**(Notes)**



# APPENDIX B:

## Terms of Reference for the Working Group on Gays and Lesbians and the Church

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For some time, the Human Rights Unit of the Anglican Church of Canada has had, as one of its stated priorities, the promotion and defence of the human rights of the gay and lesbian community. The Unit is very much aware of the fact that public attitudes and perceptions about gay and lesbian sexuality often gives a negative colouration to the issue of human rights for this group of persons.

The Unit believes that a solution to this problem lies, in part, in an enhanced educational effort that would lead to a better understanding of the homosexual identity and of the scriptural and theological underpinnings of human rights as they apply to the gay and lesbian community.

To this end, the Unit has established a Working Group on Gays and Lesbians and the Church.

The purpose of the Working Group will be:

- 1) To pursue actively the work of scriptural and theological reflection which is necessary, within the church community, to an appropriately Christian understanding of the ethos of the gay and lesbian identity;
- 2) To pursue vigorously and creatively the educational process already under way, within the church community, regarding the concerns of Christian gays and lesbians about their role and place in society and the Church;
- 3) Actively to consider and develop strategies designed to bring the Church to adopt a more affirming and life-enhancing stance regarding the full acceptance of gay and lesbian persons as integral members of the Body of Christ and rightful participants in all aspects of church life;
- 4) Actively to pursue the opportunities for networking and collaboration with other lay and church organizations or bodies committed to the recognition and furtherance of the rights of gays and lesbians as human beings and members of the Christian community.

### Membership and Accountability

- 1) The Working Group will be a subcommittee of the Human Rights Unit, to which it will be responsible for its work and activity.

- 2) Membership in the Working Group will be national in scope, to the extent possible. Members will be appointed by the Human Rights Unit.
- 3) Membership should include both persons of homosexual and heterosexual orientation, males and females, lay and clergy persons, representing all parts of the Church. In view of the role of the Working Group in the area of strategy development, the membership should include members of the House of Bishops and the National Executive Council.
- 4) Because of the nature of the work that will be expected of the Working Group, its members shall be persons of vision and courage who are seriously committed to: exploration of the Church's stance on human sexuality, and particularly homosexuality; furtherance of the interests of gays and lesbians towards full acceptance and meaningful participation in all aspects of the life of the Church; the human rights of gay and lesbian clergy; a rational, objective, and creative consideration of issues; extensive reading and reflection in and around the Working Group's area of investigation; an active role in the development and drafting of discussion papers for consideration by the Working Group, the Human Rights Unit, and the Anglican Church of Canada as a whole.
- 5) In the interest of efficiency in carrying out the mandate of the Working Group, membership will be limited to twelve. The Group will review its membership annually to ensure that all of its members remain actively committed to its purposes and tasks.
- 6) The Working Group will meet three times a year for one-day intensive working sessions in conjunction with the meetings of the Human Rights Unit. In addition, its members will, upon accepting membership, commit themselves to active work on Working Group concerns in between meetings.
- 7) The Working Group will provide regular progress reports on its work to the Human Rights Unit.

Approved by the Human Rights Unit  
18 September, 1987

*The members of the Working Group on Gays and Lesbians and the Church are: the Rev. Joyce E. Barnett, the Rev. Dr. Terry Brown, the Rev. Douglas J. Fox, Dr. Luigi E. Girolametto, the Rev. Bradley Lennon, Mr. Kenneth A. Tipper, Ms. Elizabeth Wensley, the Rev. Donna J. Wilson, and Ms. Irene Fraser (staff). The contributions of the following former members are gratefully acknowledged: Dr. Michel Gaulin, and Ms. Celia Hannant.*

# APPENDIX C:

## Glossary

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**ACPO:**

Advisory Committee on Postulants for Ordination, a mechanism used by many Anglican dioceses to advise the bishop on the suitability of candidates for ordination

**AIDS:**

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, a fatal condition in which the person lacks resistance to otherwise mild or harmless diseases, caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), which is transmitted by exchange of infected bodily fluids, primarily blood and semen

**asexual:**

(adj.) [pertaining to] having no sexual nature, including no sexual orientation or desires;  
not to be confused with celibate (see below)

**bisexual:**

(adj.) [pertaining to] having a sexual orientation toward persons of both sexes;  
(n.) a bisexual person;  
non-gender-specific, not pejorative

**celibate:**

(adj.) [pertaining to] abstaining from full sexual activity;  
(n.) a celibate person;  
a vocation or choice of lifestyle;  
not related to sexual orientation;  
not to be confused with asexual (see above)

**"[in the] closet":**

the state of hiding one's sexual orientation, usually due to fear of others' reactions

**"coming out [of the closet]":**

the process of revealing one's sexual orientation, at various levels (to oneself, to selected others, or publicly)

**dyke:**

a lesbian;  
often used in a pejorative way, but being reclaimed as a positive word by the lesbian community

**faggot:**

a gay man;  
often used in a pejorative way, but being reclaimed as a positive word by the gay community

**gay:**

a synonym for homosexual, both as an adjective and as a noun, and preferred by most self-identified gay people;  
can be non-gender-specific, but is often used to refer specifically to gay men, the term lesbian being used for gay women

**gender identity:**

the gender which a person feels herself or himself to be;  
not to be confused with sexual orientation (see below)

**heterosexual:**

(adj.) [pertaining to] having a sexual orientation primarily toward persons of the opposite sex;  
(n.) a heterosexual person;  
non-gender-specific, not pejorative

**HIV:**

Human Immunodeficiency Virus, the causative agent of AIDS (see above)

**HIV+ (or HIV-positive):**

having the antibody to the Human Immunodeficiency Virus in one's blood;  
generally used to designate someone infected by the virus but not (yet) exhibiting the symptoms of AIDS

**homophobia:**

the irrational fear of homosexuality, and/or the irrational hatred of homosexuals

**homosexual:**

(adj.) [pertaining to] having a sexual orientation primarily toward persons of the same sex;  
(n.) a homosexual person;  
usually non-gender-specific, sometimes implying homosexual men;  
considered an impersonal, clinical term by most, but not pejorative

**lesbian:**

(adj.) [pertaining to] gay women;  
(n.) a gay woman;  
this is the term favoured by most lesbians (not pejorative)

**"out [of the closet]":**

the state of not being in the closet (see above)

**PCP:**

pneumocystis pneumonia, one of the marker diseases of AIDS

**queer:**

a homosexual person;  
often used in a pejorative way, but being reclaimed as a positive word by

the gay and lesbian community

**sexual orientation:**

the intrinsic, basic property of a person which defines the gender to which that person responds sexually;  
not to be confused with gender identity (see above)

**sexual preference:**

sometimes used as a synonym for sexual orientation, but not favoured because it implies a superficial choice, or simply a matter of taste

**sexuality:**

the way a person feels about, reacts to, and deals with the self and others in the realm of sex, influenced by complex social, psychological, spiritual and biological factors

**straight:**

a synonym for heterosexual;  
very commonly used, but some gay people do not like the implication that non-straight is deviant or inferior, and some heterosexuals do not like the implication that straight is rigid or boring

**transsexual:**

(adj.) [pertaining to] having a gender identity contrary to the physical gender at birth;  
(n.) a transsexual person;  
not necessarily related to sexual orientation;  
non-gender-specific, not pejorative;  
not to be confused with transvestite (see below)

**transvestite:**

a person who dresses in clothing normally associated with the opposite sex;  
not generally related either to sexual orientation or to gender identity;  
non-gender-specific, not pejorative;  
not to be confused with transsexual (see above)

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**WORKSPACE/NOTES:**

**(Notes)**