

NOT FOR PUBLIC CIRCULATION

Concerning Pastoral Care to the Same-sex Attracted by The Rev'd C. Dawn McDonald

Contrary to what the pro-gay lobby group would have us believe, there are many conservative persons with same-sex attraction in the Anglican Church who do not wish to have this attraction affirmed by the church and are “seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships”. (Lambeth Conference 1998: Resolution 1.10(c) Human Sexuality).

I know this to be true, because I have ‘been there’. I have struggled with gender-dysphoria (dislike of one’s gender) and same-sex attraction for a great part of my life, and I lived as an active lesbian for thirteen years. I met the Lord transformationally sixteen years ago and I now have new life in Him. I also know this to be true, because I have encountered in my ministry individuals who share similar stories of transformation.

In this paper, I will offer some general observations, discuss same-sex attraction, and make some suggestions as to how the Church can begin to provide biblically sound pastoral care for same-sex attracted individuals. This is by no means an exhaustive research paper, but is my personal reflections drawn out of my own experience, observations and knowledge of the topic.

Definitions of Key Terms

At best, human communication is difficult. Words and their intention elude us in interpretation. I wish therefore to define my use of some terms in this essay.

Some people can be emotionally attracted to same-sex individuals, while sexually attracted to the opposite sex. For this reason, I have used **Same-Sex Attraction (SSA)** to mean sexual attraction to a person of one’s own gender, and I speak of “the SSA” and “SSA individuals”, meaning people so attracted. I have also used **Same-sex orientation** to mean sexual preference for same-sex partners. By **Same-Sex behaviour**, I mean sexual behaviour expressing the same-sex orientation. And although I realize it is a problematic label for some, I have used **ex-gay** to mean individuals who have experienced sexual reorientation. Wherever possible, I have avoided the use of “homosexual”.

When I refer to **conservatives**, I mean Anglicans who hold to the church’s traditional teaching on human sexuality. **Revisionists** in this essay refer to those who are working towards changing that traditional teaching.

Observations

Today, the move to affirm committed same-sex relationships as a form, not of sin, but of holiness is ripping the fabric of the Anglican Communion apart. To those who are ill-

NOT FOR PUBLIC CIRCULATION

informed, it may seem a puzzling development that has hit the church suddenly, and out of nowhere. But quite the opposite, what we are experiencing as a church is really a manifestation of a long and growing estrangement between conservative and revisionist moral thinking, now manifested in the controversy about homosexuality.

With rapid and radical socio-cultural changes influencing the church, the revisionists have been pushing hard for the church to affirm committed same-sex relationships. To them, this is a social justice issue, a matter of compassion, and human rights. Where conservatives have tended to simply point to Scripture and reiterate conventional moral theology on homosexuality, revisionists for the most part have rejected traditional Christian moral thinking on homosexuality altogether, and are busy proclaiming that love, justice, and human rights are all that count.

In fact, it appears, (as I have observed elsewhere¹) love has been elevated above Scripture, tradition and reason, to a point where it has been given divine authority and the gospel message reduced to the converse of “God is Love” (which is, “Love is God”). As C.S. Lewis stated in *The Four Loves* (1960), “Every human love, at its height, has a tendency to claim for itself a divine authority. Its voice tends to sound as if it were the will of God himself. It tells us not to count the cost, it demands of us a total commitment, it attempts to override all other claims and insinuates that any action that is sincerely done ‘for love’s sake’ is thereby lawful and even meritorious”.

The compassion that we observe in the revisionists is genuine, although from the conservative standpoint, as I see it, misguided. This is precisely what makes it such a passionately turbulent dispute. The revisionists motivated by compassion for the oppressed, are simply unable to comprehend why conservatives who serve the God whose property is Love are seemingly unwilling to budge on this issue. To simply reiterate the traditional position or to point to negative Scripture passages that the revisionists have re-interpreted or distorted does not make for dialogue, nor does it assure the revisionists of being listened to. Conservative theologians must be willing to study the revisionist thinking and grapple with what motivates it. And (be it said) revisionists also need to reexamine their tendency to treat all conventional thought on the matter of homosexuality as obsolete and irrelevant. They need also to be mindful that not all same-sex attracted persons appreciate their efforts to liberate the homosexual. Many like myself, have found liberation and healing in Christ, and more will do so in the future.

Without doubt, part of the push to promote homosexuality comes from same-sex attracted individuals within the church seeking a more gay-friendly and gay-affirming environment. Many are activists in the gay rights movement with well organized strategies.

The painful reality is that much discrimination and harassment still continue for the same-sex attracted even today in the West and in our churches. Hostile treatment is not uncommon in our society, and hate crimes are still committed against individuals who are

¹ Dawn McDonald and James Wagner, *Taking Love Seriously*, J.I. Packer ed., (Milton:Anglican Essentials Canada, 2006)

NOT FOR PUBLIC CIRCULATION

same-sex attracted. What is more, there are still places in the world where same-sex sexual behaviour is considered a capital crime. Such ill-treatment of same-sex attracted individuals should be of concern to Christians, for our baptismal covenant beckons us to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being². Every one no matter how despicable or repulsive we may think their behaviour to be deserves the same respect our Lord would not hesitate to give them.

Some would argue that the Judeo-Christian influence in our culture has helped spawn homophobic discrimination. Although there may be some truth to this, it would be wrong to solely blame traditional Christian moral teachings for such hostility. The fact is, same-sex sexual behaviour has been considered a taboo in almost all cultures, including countries where the Judeo-Christian ideology has not enjoyed extensive influence. For so many different religions and cultures to consider same-sex sexual behaviour “unnatural” and a taboo, suggests that there may just be an intrinsic repulsion in the human psyche against same-sex sexual behaviour.

Revisionists have contested that the traditional moral values are the cause for the prevalence of depression among the same-sex attracted. Depression is in fact common amongst the same-sex attracted, and according to one study, there is evidence of a strong association between suicide risks and bisexuality or homosexuality in males.³ Some revisionists have linked the depression and suicidality to the identity dissonance that same-sex attracted people experience, and have attempted to attribute the source of dissonance to the conflict in religious values and sexual desires.⁴ However, to focus only on religious belief as the source of conflict is misleading. According to Warren Throckmorton PhD and Mark Yarhouse PsyD, many same-sex attracted individuals have conflicts with traditional values regarding marriage and family, and many desire a more traditional sexuality, and “people experiencing such conflict often experience a host of problems as the result of being unable to resolve what they perceive to be irreconcilable differences between their values and attitudes and sexual feelings.”⁵

We need be careful that we do not attribute the prevalence of depression in same-sex attracted individuals entirely to the identity dissonance. For some, the homosexual lifestyle and behaviour (or for that matter any sinful behaviour) can be triggers for depression.⁶ It is worth noting here that the gay rights movement has utilized the depression factor to its own advantage, saying what makes gay persons unhappy is how they are treated. They have promoted the victim imagery and campaigned to “reach

² *The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada*, (Toronto: Anglican Book Center, 1985) P. 159

³ Gary Remafedi, MD, MPH, Simone French, PhD, Mary Story, PhD, Michael D. Resnich, PhD, and Robert Blum, MD, PhD, *The Relationship between Suicide Risk and Sexual Orientation: Results of a Population-Based Study*, American Journal of Public Health. 1998; 88:57-60.

⁴ For example, the dissonance and the greater suicide risks of homosexual youths (reported in a Montreal study) was one of the reasons the Most Rev'd Andrew Hutchison, the former Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada gave for his stance on the same-sex unions in his conversation with me.

⁵ Warren Throckmorton, Ph.D., & Mark A. Yarhouse, Psy.D. (2006). *Sexual identity therapy: Practice framework for managing sexual identity conflicts*, P. 3

⁶ Reference taken from <http://www.exodus.to/content/view/200/52/> as posted on August 30, 2007

NOT FOR PUBLIC CIRCULATION

straights on an emotional level, casting gays as society's victims and inviting straights to be their protectors"⁷.

One major contribution of the gay rights movement to our current dispute is the "born gay" contention⁸, which has largely convinced the culture that sexual orientation is fixed, and that "gays are victims of circumstance" who are no more able to "choose" their sexual orientation than they can choose their height or the color of their eyes⁹. According to this understanding, if orientation is not something that one can choose, then sinfulness, perversion, and seduction are categories that do not apply, and if so, how can the church justify demanding repentance and change? To the revisionists, it is as though one is being denied acceptance in the church for the color of one's skin, or for one's height.

On the surface, the problem is that of two immutable factors in collision: the "unchangeable" sexual orientation and the unchanging Word of God. Unquestionably, on the conservative view, the Word of God must prevail, and same-sex behaviour must go. The traditional interpretation of Scripture is clear that homosexual behaviour is sinful¹⁰. To them, the very fact that the revisionists could even suggest that a holy God could bless what is sinful is scandalous and abominable. The revisionists fail to comprehend just how primary and authoritative the Scripture is in the lives of conservatives, and they consider the conservatives' unwillingness to modify the position of Scripture as callous and unloving. To conservatives, the move to bless same-sex unions is as appalling and repugnant as the thought of promoting incest as something that God would bless.

On the other hand, for the revisionists, if orientation is hardwired, then the only thing that can possibly change is the interpretation of Scripture. Some have worked hard to achieve this. In the 1980s, a steady flow of pro-gay scholars such as John Boswell (1980) and Robin Scroggs (1983) challenged the traditional interpretation of biblical texts pertinent to homosexuality.¹¹ It was as though the gay rights movement and its impact on the culture was the only light in which Scripture should be interpreted.

Parenthetically, polarization over gay-rights and homosexuality is not unique in our Anglican Church. Similar polarization is found in almost every sector: The Government, the judicial system, and the educational system, to name a few. One only has to visit the website for the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH)¹² to see that even the American Psychiatric Association (APA) which (under

⁷ Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen, *After the Ball: How America will conquer its fear & hatred of gays in the 90s*, (New York: Doubleday, 1989) P. 187

⁸ Ibid., 184 Kirk and Madsen write, "We argue that, for all practical purposes, gays should be considered to have been *born gay* – even though sexual orientation, for most humans, seems to be the product of a complex interaction between innate predisposition and environmental factors during childhood and early adolescence."

⁹ Ibid., Pp. 183 -185

¹⁰ This interpretation has now been powerfully indicated by Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001)

¹¹ This was something the gay rights movement set out to do as can be seen in Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen, *After the Ball*. 170.

¹² Visit NARTH.COM for more information on NARTH

NOT FOR PUBLIC CIRCULATION

political pressure and not because of scientific findings) removed homosexuality from the list of pathological disorders in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders) in 1980 is polarized over the issue.

It is baffling to see how the revisionists within Anglicanism who speak of compassion and justice bulldoze others to push their agenda through. The pain felt in the Body of Christ is immeasurable as we helplessly watch the very fabric of our Anglican Communion disintegrate before our eyes. Indeed, the cost of their “crusade of love and justice” seems no longer consequential to the revisionists. The bitter irony is that not all those whom they intend to “rescue” want the rescue, and that for the most part, the revisionists are meeting only the desires of a small militant group.

Sadly, many same-sex attracted in the church are left feeling like children caught in a bitter custody battle: The current debate has traumatized the ex-gays and the same-sex attracted individuals living celibate and chaste lives, and left them with a sense of abandonment as they grapple with the reality that the church they love is ceasing to be a safe place for them so that their spiritual welfare is at stake.

The revisionist assumption is that all self-identified homosexuals want their sexuality affirmed by the church, and their unions blessed. But they are wrong on this, and they pay no attention to the fact that many same-sex attracted individuals do not want what they are promoting. The truth is that there are many same-sex attracted persons who have tried living the gay-lifestyle, are fed-up with it, and have come into the church seeking for *“God’s transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships, and His life transforming power in their lives”*.

Same-Sex Attraction

In all earnestness, we ought to be concerned about the revisionist zeal and willingness to embrace homosexuality as a normal and healthy alternative to heterosexuality. We have such limited understanding of the etiology of homosexuality, the medical and health risks associated with the homosexual lifestyle (and I am not talking just of AIDS here), and furthermore, the effects on children being raised by homosexual parents.

From all indications the origin of SSA is multifactorial (genetic predisposition interacting with one’s environment) and diverse. Often, there are clear identifiable life events such as traumas, incidences of abuse (emotional, physical, sexual and spiritual), same-sex wounds (wounds inflicted by same-sex parent or peers), opposite-sex wounds, gender dysphoria (dislike of one’s own gender), and parental influences in a child’s life. In my own case, my lack of a healthy relationship with my father and lack of ability to trust men due to sexual abuse, coupled with a defensive detachment from my mother rendered me unable to relate in a healthy manner.

We live in a broken world, and it is my view that similar factors contributing to SSA are found in sexual addiction, substance addictions, and various forms of prior sexual

NOT FOR PUBLIC CIRCULATION

brokenness. Causes are complex and different for each individual, and so are the manifestations varied, owing to the disposition of the individuals and the choices they make. In providing pastoral care to the same-sex attracted, we need to be aware that there may be other conditions that the person needs to address as well. Depression, psychological disorders, sexual addiction and substance abuse are frequent amongst same-sex attracted individuals. Substance abuse or sexually acting out may be a “mood altering” behavior for the SSA who is struggling with such feelings as guilt, shame, anxiety, and a profound sense of aloneness as a result of his/her unwanted SSA.

We also need to be mindful of the fact that there are numerous sub-cultures within the gay community such as the leather culture associated with BDSM (Bondage/Discipline, Dominance/Submission, Sado/Masochism), transvestites (those who obtain sexual gratification by cross-dressing or adopting the manner or the sexual role of the opposite sex), transsexuals (those whose sexual identification is now entirely with the opposite sex, but who have undergone sex changes), and even bisexuals (those who are sexually attracted to both sexes). Basically, the gay sub-cultures orbit around different types of people, action, and fetishes. Needless to say, there are oodles of pastoral and theological issues arising out of the sub-cultures. Here, I only wish to point out that when we speak of committed same-sex unions, or an individual who is same-sex attracted, there is a gamut of possible scenarios with different requirements for pastoral care in different cases.

Revisionists frequently argue that we are created in the image of God, our sexuality is a gift from God, and all sexuality is good. However, what they omit is that we are fallen creatures, and that humanity as God intended is not the humanity we find in ourselves and others in this broken and corrupted world today. The consequence of the Fall is that we have lapsed and deviated far from God’s design of humanity, and everything about us has been contaminated by sin, including our sexuality. What the list of subcultures just given reveals is just how far removed we have become from sexuality as God planned it to be. In our highly sexualized world, our fallen sexuality assails us and we are desensitized through constant media exposure of our fallenness. Basically almost any behaviour begins to look and feel normal if one is exposed to it long enough, and frequently enough. Brokenness begets brokenness, and I am convinced that our Western culture will soon see a sharp increase in the number of those sexually wounded. As a church, we need to be prepared to minister to those affected by such manifestations of sexual brokenness as sexual addiction, homosexuality, bisexuality, inter-generational sex, polygamy, and even bestiality in the days to come. It is no longer acceptable for the church to just refer the broken to para-ministries as if such ministry to the sexually broken were unimportant. We need pastors who are educated, equipped and competent in the area of sexual addiction and sexual brokenness.

Gay Identity

As humans, we have never defined ourselves by sexual categories or by labels such as “heterosexual,” “bisexual and homosexual” before. In fact, there isn’t even a way of measuring sexual orientation. Orientation is self-identified and self-defined. Even the

NOT FOR PUBLIC CIRCULATION

concept of categorizing oneself as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual is relatively new in the western world.

How we identify ourselves is very important. When I say I am a Christian, my identity as a Christian dictates how I should think, live, and act. And likewise, when I was living in the gay lifestyle, there was a similar commitment to the gay subculture so that I thought as a “gay” person, and acted accordingly.

Development of gay identity in a person is significant. Much can be said on this topic, but for the scope of this paper, it suffices to say there is a process marked by an internal struggle before individuals accept the gay identity and integrate it into their self-concept. For same-sex attracted individuals who have struggled inwardly for years, acceptance of a gay identity can bring an end to the aggravation and pain. This is the freedom and relief that self-identified gays and lesbians often speak of as having come to them in their “coming out”.

What’s important to stress here is that before a gay identity is adopted by an individual, one can be same-sex attracted and not consider oneself gay, lesbian, or homosexual. For this paper, I wish to simplify things a little and to identify three developmental phases where the individual (1) has become aware of his/her same-sex attraction, (2) is developing a gay identity, and (3) is acting it out sexually.

Ministry focus

Ministry focus and needs in each of the developmental phases will differ. While acting out sexually can come either before or after one labels oneself, once the person acts out and sexual imprinting takes place, a reversal of the sexual orientation becomes difficult. In the early development of SSA, ministry must center on prevention of the sexualizing of the same sex attraction and seeking healing and reconciliation in the disordered areas of interpersonal relationships. This is mostly done by helping each individual understand their pain, sense of loss, shame, fear, and anger. I would emphasize that the focus at this stage is on ministering and asking for God’s healing of the underlying dysfunctional issues and emotional distresses, rather than of their SSA.

With a person who has developed a gay identity, or is already acting out, the reversal of the gay-identity and reconstructing one’s own self-concept must be the focus. In Romans 12:2 we read, “Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind”. To reverse the gay identity, a renewal of the mind is needed. Emphasis is to be placed on the person’s identity in Christ, and God’s design for the person’s life. Meaningful and appropriate friendship with heterosexual peers of one’s own gender is critical for cultivating a healthy gender-identity, and it is the calling of every Christian who would minister to SSA individuals to initiate and maintain such friendships.

To reverse the acting out, encouragement is needed to live a chaste and holy life, learning to offer up one’s body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Romans 12:1). It is important to remember that sometimes myriads of small changes need to happen internally before we can observe a noticeable change in the person. What is of vital

NOT FOR PUBLIC CIRCULATION

importance is that the SSA person sets realistic and incremental goals in his/her healing journey. These goals may be something like aspiring to a disciplined celibacy or managing homoerotic impulses and feelings in the context of a heterosexual marriage. Whether the healing journey yields more than this varies from case to case.

While I believe change is possible, I assert that the goal is obedience to Christ and not heterosexuality as such. Equally vital is the point that the goals are to be set by the SSA individual rather than by the pastoral caregiver. Whatever happens, we should not pressure the individual to do things he/she is not comfortable doing. Neither should the individual be discouraged from pursuing change in orientation when change is what he/she seeks. Regardless of the goals, it is likely best to impress upon the SSA individual that though God has been known to offer instant relief from the SSA just as He does from time to time heal those with terminal cancer, this is not common, and one should expect the journey of seeking change to be a life long affair, part of one's larger lifelong journey of obedience and surrender to Christ.

Pastoral Care

A fundamental problem in the church is that there are individuals who are happy with their sexuality, and want to remain in the gay life-style unchanged. (This impenitence should not surprise us, as rebelliousness is one of the basic human conditions resulting from the Fall) However, they are not the sum total of the SSA constituency in the church. I believe there are two major periods of ministry opportunities to the SSA: (1) during the formation of a gay identity, and (2) when a person becomes disillusioned with his/her gay identity after years of living the lifestyle and is ready for a change. This paper now reviews the pastoral care to be given to such individuals in both camps.

Be Welcoming

A story was told to me of a friend of a friend. She was attending a church in California, where every Sunday, she found a gay couple sitting in front of her, and their holding hands throughout the service bothered her very much. It did not matter where she sat; they seemed to have the knack of sitting in front of her. She was so disgusted one day that she decided to go to church late so that she could choose where to sit. She walked in, chose a seat where the couple were not seated in front of her, and sat down in glee. Well, who should walk in late but the couple! And where do you think they sat? You guessed it. In front of her!! I was told that in disgust, she cried out to the Lord saying, "Lord, I cannot worship in this church with *these people* in it!!" And the Lord convicted her, saying "Did you not come here to worship me? Why are you looking at them? To you, it may look as though homosexuality is the most important thing in their lives that they need to deal with, but I am dealing with other things in their lives. I am drawing them to myself".

Far too often, the church demands an all-round change in behaviour before the person is accepted in the church. We don't try to clean fish before we catch them, do we? So why is it that we expect only shining saints to walk through our church doors? What is

NOT FOR PUBLIC CIRCULATION

guaranteed is that the next person to walk in through the church doors is going to be a sinner. Jesus said those who are ill do not need him. He came for those who are broken. And it is in encountering Christ that we are changed. Where do we encounter Christ? More often than not, in the church.

Offer Community

There is value in a community, and we need to offer community to the same-sex attracted. A gay identity is also a social and political identity. What the gay community offers for the same-sex attracted is the sense of belonging. It is important to remember that feeling rejected by the world and the church, the “gays” have often turned to each other for support, and in their community they have felt comfortable, safe, and perhaps for the first time in their lives, felt they can “fit in”, and be at home. If the church is going to ask the same-sex attracted to leave their lifestyle and community and place of acceptance, then it must be ready to offer them an alternative community in which also they can feel safe and accepted.

This need to belong and to “fit in” is extremely powerful in individuals with SSA who have felt “different” most of their lives. Individuals with SSA also tend to suffer from intimacy disorder, and radical distrust, and they need us to initiate and allure them into a personal relationship.

It is only in being valued in relationships as individuals that we learn to value ourselves. And we all need to be valued as members of the Body of Christ. The same is true of people with SSA. For those who are wounded and broken sexually, the church needs to model God’s unconditional love and acceptance as God’s community. The church also needs to be a place where the individual finds God’s grace, and where members are taught to behave graciously. It only takes one discouraging or judgmental remark from a church member to discourage the seeker from pursuing the course of transformation.

Become mentoring friends

What is broken through bad relationships can only be restored and healed through good relationships. If I am unable to trust due to wounds received in my primary relationships, I can only learn to trust through healthy relationships with others. If the church is serious about walking with the sexually broken, it needs to seriously equip and train “walk-along-siders”, who will befriend, disciple, and keep company with the same-sex attracted.

Again, godly relationships with heterosexuals of one’s own gender are critical for cultivating a healthy gender-identity. Men need men and women need women to learn gender-appropriate behaviour. As well, for those SSA individuals who have never experienced healthy bonding with their parents, mentoring couples can bring remarkable healing as well. Such mentoring friends and couples need to have some understanding of sexual brokenness and codependency so that healthy boundaries are maintained in the relationships. Care is needed, so that wounds received in primary relationships are not simply repeated.

NOT FOR PUBLIC CIRCULATION

Many individuals with SSA need to work on relational and boundary issues. Lack of healthy boundaries in their own lives can cause them to be unsure of how to relate, and what is expected of them in relationships. The sexually abused where personal boundaries have repeatedly been broken, need particular help here. This is true, especially if they are experiencing a strong bond with someone for the first time in their lives. Learning not to sexualize strong feelings can be challenging for them at times. If they mess up or misunderstand intentions, we must be prepared to talk about it and allow them opportunities to correct the ways in which they act in these mentor relationships. It is in talking about it that they learn. This is in reality, putting into practice, the ordering of love that the Lambeth Resolution 1.10c speaks of. Many have suffered abandonment traumas as children and they need to know that they are loved, no matter what.

It is also important to note that many of the same-sex attracted individuals suffer from low self-esteem. The gay rights activists would say this is due to the stigma that follows being same-sex attracted and self-identified as homosexual. This may be true to some degree, but it also has to do with the fact that many of the sexually broken have suffered traumas of sexual abuse and emotional and perhaps even psychological neglect from a very early age.

A person who feels heard feels valued as a person. I cannot overemphasize the importance of listening ears for the SSA individuals. It is vitally important for them to tell their stories, and to share their pain and losses and to know that they are not being judged or condemned. It is crucial for us to remember that we are working with highly wounded individuals. Patience is required. Setbacks are to be expected.

Make it a safe place

The church is not a safe place for most same-sex attracted individuals. Sadly, many are afraid to share their struggles with anyone in the church for fear that the church would either affirm them in their unwanted SSA, or condemn them harshly. A pastoral caregiver should not act shocked or disgusted when same-sex attracted individuals confide in him/her of their struggles with SSA.

The church also needs to become comfortable with, as well as being a comfortable place for, those who are hurting. In today's quick fix world with immediate medication for bodily pain and suffering, we have forgotten that the Dark Night of the Soul is a valley where immeasurable learning and deepening of discipleship take place. God's fix for spiritual hurts and wayward habits, is rarely quick. Before the church can truly minister to those who are broken, the church must become comfortable with pain, and a safe place in which people are given permission to be open about their woundedness.

Teach the truth in love

What the same-sex attracted really need is love, acceptance, grace, and compassion motivated by truth that does not delight in seeing a person heading down the wrong path.

NOT FOR PUBLIC CIRCULATION

Those who minister to them must seek to embody such attitudes. Conservatives have too often come across as unfeeling (because they have not understood the struggle with SSA), judgmental (because they stopped short of calling it wicked), and uncompassionate (because they have insisted on total change before acceptance into the community). In my own experience, Scripture was quoted to me with venom. “Change or go to hell” was the message I received on numerous occasions. I must tell you that such treatment did me no good. In the end, it was the unconditional love of the Father modeled to me by a Catholic monk that brought me to my senses and back to God. While it is imperative that the standards of God as set forth in Scripture be taught, we need to be mindful that we are ambassadors of Christ to the SSA individuals. First we need to model Christ’s love, and take the presence of Christ to them. It was through Christ coming to Zacchaeus in the Gospel that Zacchaeus was changed. It is as we take the presence of Christ to the SSA that they will come to know Him, and as they draw closer to Him, will seek change.

It may sound simplistic, but my proposal is to love them unconditionally, as Christ loves, to welcome them in the fellowship, to offer them solid teaching, including solid teaching on God’s design for human sexuality that is not gay-focused, plus solid teaching in the power of God in the believer’s life, and beyond this let the Spirit do the work. Do not tell them they are going to hell, for many same-sex attracted individuals are already in a hell of their own with all the internal struggles that accompanies SSA. Tell them rather of God’s amazing grace.

When Scripture is to be quoted, it needs to be done in a loving way, and under the leading of the Holy Spirit. Although the word “abomination” is Scriptural, and applies to same-sex behaviour, in this culture where we have learned to identify ourselves by our sexuality (i.e. as “homosexual”, “gay”, “lesbian”), the separation of the person from the act is difficult. It is imperative that we do not by the words we use isolate the same-sex attracted before we have a chance to share the Gospel and to introduce them to a loving God.

Be comprehensive and positive regarding sexuality

We need to bear in mind that same-sex attracted individuals are already feeling awkward about the highly publicized conflict within the church. Because most SSA individuals are full of guilt and shame over their SSA, it is important that the church does not elevate homosexuality to a point where it sounds as though it is THE sin of the century above all other sins.

For the typical same-sex attracted person sitting in the pew (in the West), the inconsistencies found in the churches today are nauseating. This person, finds it hard to comprehend why all the fuss is over homosexuality when divorce, common-law, internet porn, fornication and adultery to name a few are not being talked about with same kind of passion. Why is it that homosexuality is coming across as THE sin of the century? Perhaps the challenge is to stop targeting this specific behaviour, and to start teaching about all aspects of sexuality as God intended it to be.

Failure does not mean failure

The 12-step model of Alcoholics Anonymous is a great model to apply in the life of any Christian, and most certainly in the lives of the SSA individuals. One of the beauties of the model is that it encourages a realistic daily surrender, and the set purpose of a lifelong walk of sobriety. The model also reminds us that when an Alcoholic or a drug addict falls off the wagon and returns to the old habits, we are not to give up on them but simply to encourage them to get back on the wagon. We have learned from AA and other programs that such setbacks are opportunities to identify the triggers that caused the setback, thus clearing the path for better behaviour next time. We know that others have made it, and have attained decades of sobriety. Difficult does not mean impossible. The path of progress is to keep on keeping on, looking to God to help

There will always be some who will claim to find the quest for change too difficult and give up, returning to the old ways. But I beg of all who read this not to give up on them. They need to know that your love and God's love for them does not depend on their success in behavioural transformation. They need to know that you love them no matter what.

Some revisionists point to the failures of ex-gay ministries, which have sometimes promised them too much and whose leaders have sometimes come to grief. They denounce this as harmful. The baffling thing for me is that to my knowledge, there never has been any study done as to what exactly has been harmful to an individual in these cases. When people ask me what I think, all I can do is point to those who have been helped. Difficult, painful, daunting and disappointing does not make anything harmful. Sometimes, the only way ahead is through the pain. But I can say with confidence born of experience that when we do walk through the valleys, God walks with us, agonizes with us, even cries with us. And He does not forsake us.

Pray without ceasing

I had a friend who prayed for me, every single day, for thirteen years that I would come to know Christ! Prayer works. Pray then for hunger and thirst for God in the hearts of our SSA friends, and pray that there will be a longing for His perfect will in their lives. Pray that the bondage to the flesh be broken, and any generational curse be lifted (needed when there has been incest or sexual abuse). Pray that God's Spirit would minister to their deeply wounded souls, and that they will learn to love Him and put Him above all. The bottom line is there is hope in Christ, and we are called to pray for one another, and God answers prayer.

Share stories of God's transforming power

Why, I wonder, is this not happening in so many of our Anglican parishes in the west? People need to start sharing what God is doing in their lives. The Scripture says we may be in error because we do not know the Scripture nor the power of God, and the power of

NOT FOR PUBLIC CIRCULATION

God becomes known through testimony. It is truly important that we encourage others to share their experiences of God at work in their lives. We need to hear how God has touched and changed the lives of those who have committed their lives to Christ. There has got to be a revival of testimonies and witnessing in our Sunday services to tell the tales of God's transforming power at work in us. Great encouragement for all will result.

Know your resources and use them wisely

Lastly, it is important to know the resources available to you, and for the same-sex attracted individuals. There are many good para-ministry resources on the Internet, and many of them offer links to recommended books and support groups. Do some investigating, and find out what is available.

Books are great resources for some individuals. However, it is important to note that not everyone is a reader, and not every book is helpful. Increasingly, audio-visual resources are becoming available.

Support groups such as Exodus, Homosexuals Anonymous, and the Zacchaeus Fellowship can give same-sex attracted individuals the assurance that they are not alone in their struggles. Support groups can educate, motivate, and help with insight and support sufficient to encourage the same-sex attracted along the path of change.

To summarize then, individuals with SSA must encounter the loving God and experience His goodness and unconditional love for them. They must be taught sound doctrine, be disciplined and be encouraged to grow in faith, and be shown how to live holy lives. Over and above solid teaching, Christians must befriend them and walk with them through their struggles. We must be mindful that it is the Holy Spirit that convicts and stirs up the desire for change in a person, and the Spirit is gentle. When I speak of change here, I mean humility to embrace the biblical standards and willingness to develop a healthy attitude of surrender towards God, offering their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This is the change into which the Holy Spirit will lead them as He will lead us all.

The good news is, God is a God of Power, and God of transformation, and restoration, and nothing is too hard for Him.

Glory to God,
whose power, working in us,
can do infinitely more
than we can ask or imagine.
Glory to God from generation to generation,
in the Church and in Christ Jesus,
Amen