

LET'S SPEAK THE TRUTH. LET'S DISPEL THE MYTH THAT ACCUSES HOMOSEXUAL PERSONS OF BEING CHILD MOLESTERS.

If you check history and examine statistics you find that this kind of accusation is simply not true! The truth is children are sexually abused most often by family members of the opposite sex.

LET'S BE CLEAR. HOMOSEXUAL PERSONS ARE NOT INTERESTED IN PERSUADING HETEROSEXUAL PERSONS TO ADOPT THEIR ORIENTATION.

Some people fear that homosexual people want to convince others that their orientation is for everyone. Instead, what is longed for is the realization that there are faithful lifestyles that differ from the majority. Others fear that if homosexuality is recognized and deemed acceptable, young people will then choose to "become" homosexual people, but people do not "become" homosexual through role-modelling.

LET'S BE REALISTIC. HOMOSEXUAL PERSONS ARE NOT "OUT THERE TRYING TO GET INTO THE CHURCH".

Many quietly keep the reality of their homosexual orientation a secret, because they are systematically discouraged from revealing their identity, and threatened when they do. Care must be taken when stories or opinions are shared. Justice and understanding are required, not ridicule and verbal abuse. When there are flippant comments about "them", many of "them" are nearby, listening, hoping for neighbourly care, and expecting to continue to offer gifts as part of the church community.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- * Read some of the excellent material available on homosexuality, homophobia and heterosexism and mention it to your friends.
- * Do not laugh at jokes/comments made at the expense of lesbian/gay people. Indicate that you find these offensive.
- * Develop an operating style that respects each person as an independent/autonomous human being.
- * Join Friends of Affirm.
- * Make public statements – formal and informal – demanding an end to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.
- * Expand your understanding of "family" to include a variety of intimate, life-giving relationships.
- * Include words such as "lesbian", "gay", "bisexual", "heterosexual", etc. in your vocabulary (and practise saying them without stumbling or blushing).
- * Talk with lesbian and gay friends about what actions and attitudes they find oppressive and what actions and attitudes are liberating.
- * In "get acquainted" times, ask people about something other than their families. Be imaginative – ask how they like to spend their time, what they like to read, what excited them, etc.
- * Wear "Let's Talk" buttons – and be willing to talk.
- * Use inclusive language when referring to partners/lifemates/spouses, etc. This allows folk in varieties of relationships to speak about the people with whom they share life without significant risk.

LET'S TALK ABOUT HOMOPHOBIA...

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Please feel free to duplicate.

Words spoken by some United Church folk....

"Most often when a face is attached to an issue, people can be reasonable and rational and even compassionate. The real horror for me in being found out is that I have known people's anger and fear against homosexual people to be such that they are not beyond brutally attacking gay and lesbian people. Living with that kind of fear eventually kills the soul".

...a faithful choir member.

"While everyone else in the group took their turn lifting up something to celebrate about life with their spouse, I realized that I had much to celebrate about life with my partner, but that I wouldn't dare speak about it".

...a U.C.W. member

"I'm not sure how much longer I can live with the life and dilemma of remaining silent about my sexual orientation so that I may be accepted, and declaring myself so that I may be set free".

*...a student in the
candidature process.*

"One of the hardest things is when people on the one hand speak in absolutely glowing terms about what I'm like and what I'm doing and then in the next breath rage about those 'sick perverts that ought to be lined up and shot'".

...an ordained minister.

"On being received as a member in the United Church of Canada were, 'You are entitled to all the rights and privileges of membership in the United Church of Canada'. For me there was a gut-wrenching, knowing that this was not true".

*...a new member of the
United Church.*

A **PHOBIA** is a "persistent and irrational fear of a specific object, activity or situation that results in a compelling desire to avoid the dreaded object, activity, or situation."

(American Psychiatric Association, 1980)

HOMOPHOBIA...

...is a pervasive irrational fear of homosexuality.

...more closely resembles a prejudice than a phobia.

...contains not only fear but an element of hatred.

...often causes people to inflict physical and psychological suffering upon homosexual persons.

...causes persons to avoid behaviours (particularly affectionate and expressive behaviours towards members of his/her own sex) that might be construed as "gay".

...causes heterosexual persons to fear any homosexual feelings within themselves.

**AS A COMMUNITY WE MUST RECOGNIZE OUR
HOMOPHOBIA AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY
FOR COUNTERACTING THE BIAS THAT RUNS
THROUGH OUR CULTURE, OUR INSTITUTIONS,
OUR CHURCH.**

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO HOMOPHOBIA

Much of God's work of creation is filled with mystery. Human sexuality is one of those mysteries which causes us to wonder: why we love; what attracts us to each individual.

We can and do choose to respond to mystery with a sense of wonder and awe. However, we are often a people not at ease with the unknown and the unknowable – and so we respond in fear. Within the Church, the fear of homosexuality and homosexual people has cut us off from one another. That fear has prevented us from seeing into the heart and soul of one another. That fear has kept us from loving each other.

To this, the Gospel has some very pointed things to say....

Love and fear cannot abide together; "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear". Only when we love with the love that is of God will we be released from the fears that keep us separated.

In response to the question, "who is my neighbour?", Jesus tells a parable wherein the neighbour is the most unlikely person. The one who was seen to be unclean and beyond the reach of God's love turns out to be the bearer of God's love. The Gospel commands us to love our neighbour.

Repeatedly, Jesus deliberately identified with the poor, with women and children – the powerless ones of his society. In so doing he demonstrates that God is with these people, calling for and establishing their liberation, in the face of a society that systematically denies them the basic rights and privileges of being human. That same liberating Spirit stirs in the Church today – calling for and establishing the liberation of gay and lesbian people...of all people. The Gospel urges us to follow Jesus.