

## **I. Introduction**

### *A. Mandate and grounds*

The Committee to Give Direction about and for Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members was appointed by Synod 1996, with the following mandate and grounds:

That synod appoint a study committee to give direction about and for pastoral care of homosexual members in a manner consistent with the decisions of Synod 1973 (*Acts of Synod 1973*, Report 42).

#### *Grounds:*

1. Since the recommendations of Report 42 are now a generation old, it is time to review how effectively they encourage the churches in providing ministry to their homosexual members.
2. Christian homosexuals are beginning to turn away from their isolation, despair, and practice (homosexuality) and are beginning to turn to the church for a sense of community. Many ministries to homosexuals have developed in the years since the 1973 report on homosexuality was written. The churches of our denomination would be well served by a study to evaluate these ministries and give direction to our churches on the subject of homosexuality.
3. This study could help us to understand to what degree the pastoral recommendations of Report 42 of Synod 1973 have been effectively carried out and to uncover reasons why this may or may not be so.
4. This issue is too big for any of our churches or classes to deal with individually. Several classes and congregations have conducted such studies (e.g., Classes Alberta North, Grand Rapids East, and Toronto and the council of First CRC, London, Ontario). But these local studies have not exhaustively studied all the available ministry possibilities.

(*Acts of Synod 1996*, pp. 572-73)

### *B. Report to Synod 1999*

#### 1. Part I (*Agenda for Synod 1999*, pp. 237-46)

The report to Synod 1999 was presented in two parts. Part I was sent directly to the churches in the fall of 1998, and Part II was combined with Part I in the printed *Agenda for Synod 1999*, pp. 237-79. Part I contained information about the membership and experience of the committee, the process followed by the committee, a report detailing the survey conducted among CRC ministers regarding ministry to homosexual members, and a recommended prayer of confession.

Summarized briefly, the membership of the original committee numbered nine, including six clergy (representing areas of parish, education, theology, and pastoral care ministries), one physician, one educator, and one psychologist. Over one hundred years of professional experience was

represented on the committee, including significant ministry with persons who have same-sex attractions and related issues.

The process of the committee was initially one of listening, information-gathering, study, and deliberation. Many individuals, couples, and groups from diverse locations in the United States and Canada were met and heard. These guests described not only their pain, loneliness, and isolation as church members with same-sex attractions but also their hope that the church can become more of a place where they feel they can belong and openly participate.

The results of a survey of Christian Reformed pastors in parish and special ministries were also described in Part I of the committee report. The committee concluded, based on the survey results, that for a variety of reasons, many congregations had little knowledge of the report presented to Synod 1973 or of its pastoral recommendations. Furthermore, the survey revealed that guidelines had not, by and large, been effectively carried out in most congregations. The specific pastoral guidelines of the 1973 report were listed, and the committee suggested that what most individuals with same-sex attractions have experienced from the churches is not at all in line with the ministry envisioned in the pastoral recommendations and promises of 1973. As such, the committee asked Synod 1999 to call the churches to repentance for their failures, as expressed in a prayer contained in Part I. Synod 1999 called the churches to repentance for their failures to minister to persons who experience same-sex attractions and added the prayer presented by the committee to serve as an acceptable expression of that repentance.

2. Part II (*Agenda for Synod 1999*, pp. 247-79)

The committee submitted Part II of its report to Synod 1999 for information with a request that synod make the entire report (Parts I and II) available to the churches for study and response. This request was granted, and churches were asked to forward their responses to the report to the committee by April 1, 2000.

Part II contained discussion of such matters as the spiritual ministry of the church, common spiritual issues among persons with same-sex attractions, guidelines to evaluate ministries, justice issues, transformational ministries, and ministry to families. Some suggested readings and a review of biological, psychological, and exegetical issues were appended.

In requesting that the churches study and respond to the report, the committee sought to gather information from the churches that could contribute to the work of the committee, and to provide a final report that would reflect a broader denominational commitment to this area of ministry. Over fifty churches responded to the request to study the report and provide a response. Each committee member reviewed these responses, and they are considered in this final report.

C. *Church responses*

In the responses from the churches, two issues surfaced repeatedly: the prayer of repentance and the distinction between the condition of homosexuality and homosexual behavior (homosexuality).

Objections advanced to the prayer of repentance were the lack of culpability, the impropriety of a call for corporate repentance, and erroneous conclu-

sions from the survey results. The committee did not submit the prayer of repentance without some reservation, but did, however, submit it to the body of Christ, where “if one suffers, every part suffers with it; if one is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). Also in submitting the prayer, the committee was mindful of the Psalms, many of which are corporate calls to thanksgiving, to lament, and to repentance. It was in such a context that the committee submitted the prayer in its report, and subsequently, Synod 1999 prayed it and offered it to the churches.

The second issue, the distinction between the condition and behavior raised the question, “Is not the desire itself sinful even if the person does not act on that desire?” Perhaps the 1999 report was unclear in its response to this question. The committee has attempted to address this question in the “Common Spiritual Issues” section later in this report. Additionally, there were those in the responding churches from both sides of the issue who maintained that the 1973 distinction between the condition or orientation and the behavior was not biblically and/or psychologically sound.

#### *D. Reflections*

Throughout its work over the past five years, the committee has recognized the sensitivities and complexities inherent in issues involving persons with same-sex attractions. We have attempted to remember that this is not just a “subject” or an “issue,” but an endeavor that involves the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of humans made in the image and likeness of God.

In the process of addressing ministry to individuals with same-sex attractions, the committee has been repeatedly challenged by thoughtful individuals within the Christian community about exegetical issues. Some question the validity of the church’s exegesis in 1973 that called for a distinction between “homosexuality” and “homosexuality.” Others question the validity of the church’s current exegesis of those scriptural passages that speak of sexual behavior between persons of the same sex. The committee frequently discussed to what extent we were mandated to look further at what the Scriptures say about homosexuality. We reached the conclusion that we were not asked to reexamine scriptural texts that deal explicitly or implicitly with homosexuality. This conclusion appeared consistent with the latter part of the mandate given by Synod 1996, which stated that we were to give direction “. . . in a manner consistent with the decisions of 1973.” Thus, we considered the Scriptures more in light of how they could guide us attitudinally as we looked at where we have been since 1973 and how we could more effectively encourage and equip individuals and churches to minister to members with same-sex attractions. However, given the thoughtful challenges posed by individuals and churches within the denomination, there may be wisdom, both pastorally and theologically, for the church to address these concerns at some time in the future.

Finally, it was clear from many presentations and discussions with individuals and groups, and from the responses by churches, that there is considerable diversity of opinion and feeling within the denomination about individuals with same-sex attractions and ministry to them. We believe it is important for diverse perspectives to be able to be openly discussed and examined. We also believe that it is important that members of our church family who experience same-sex attractions can belong to, openly participate in, and be ministered to

within the fellowship of the church. It is our hope that the work of this committee and the contents of the report that follows will advance that end and assist our churches in ministering more effectively in the name of Christ.

## II. The spiritual ministry of the church

The church ministers in many ways, especially through the teaching and proclamation of the Word of God, through worship, through prayers, through the holy sacraments, and through pastoral visits. The church ministers in these ways to all its members. It proclaims the gospel, making known that we are all saved by grace through Jesus Christ. It calls us to faith and to commitment. It calls us to an obedient life and to gratitude to God. More specifically, it teaches us, among other things, about ourselves and about our sexuality, its purposes and its boundaries. The church instructs, guides, comforts, and sometimes admonishes, even rebukes, when we are not obedient to the commands of our Lord.

All of this is ministry, essential ministry for all persons, including those who are homosexual. When the church reminds us of our brokenness and tells us not to trust our own spirits but to trust the Spirit of God, who speaks through the Scriptures, it is ministering to us about our sexuality. And when the church invites us to come to the table of the Lord as repentant sinners, we are once again *one in the Lord* in spite of all our differences and in spite of our sins. This is ministry, essential ministry—also to persons who are homosexual—ministry that helps them find their place within the body of Christ.

The church does not always create special ministries for specific groups of people—for example, parents who have lost children in death or persons disabled by accident in their youth—even though these people have specific angularities to their spiritual needs. The church ministers to these as well as others through all the regular ministries that Christ has assigned to it.

In addition to all of these regular ministries, the church must sometimes focus its ministry on the specific needs of certain people. That is what the 1973 report on homosexuality spoke about. But that kind of ministry has often not been done. However, since much of it is private, more of it may be taking place than we think, though it is known only to those involved. Because many persons who are homosexual have not made this fact known to the church out of fear of the response they might receive, the church has had no opportunity to minister to the specific needs of these people.

As a committee, we heard wonderful stories from some homosexual persons about how other members of the church have supported them, encouraged them, helped them overcome their shame, and admonished them when they needed admonition. However, more commonly we heard stories of the church's silence and lack of ministry, stories that indicate an unwillingness on the part of the church to talk with them about their same-sex attractions and their spiritual struggles.

When considering a specific ministry to persons who are homosexual, we do well to remember that there is no such person as "the homosexual." Same-sex attraction in no way defines the personality, morality, life-style, occupation, or family history of homosexual persons. They are as different from each other as heterosexual persons are. Some are moral; others are not. Some are caring, loving people who love the Lord with all their heart and soul and mind, and others are not.

Ministry, especially pastoral care, must be specific to each person. Prejudgment is prejudice. Making pastoral assumptions before meeting a person and hearing her or his story is not only poor pastoral care, it also violates an officebearer's subscription to the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 43), which reminds us not to "judge anyone unheard." In spite of their individual differences, the conversations we have had with persons who are homosexual and the literature we have read about homosexuality identified several common spiritual issues among homosexual persons.

### **III. Common spiritual issues among homosexual persons**

#### *A. Shame*

Persons who experience same-sex attractions have some common experiences that require the ministry of the church. The first and in many ways the most significant of these is their experience of themselves as different, as abnormal, as being not the way most others are. Since their differentness is related to their sexuality, it is a very personal and private matter. Their early responses to this growing awareness, usually in early adolescence, include a wish to keep it concealed and an attendant fear of exposure. They sense that if others would know, they would lose esteem, be judged negatively, and perhaps be ridiculed and rejected. These early shame responses sometimes lead to an intrapsychic denial of the same-sex attraction, which can persist well into adulthood.

The process of becoming self-aware is often a complex experience. For many it begins at an early age and gains definition as they grow older. They may discover that they are attracted to persons of the same sex as well as to persons of the opposite sex and that the balance between these two shifts as they mature. If, as they grow older, their same-sex attractions become dominant, the outcome is often a deep loneliness and a sense of isolation. They develop a deep sense of not belonging, even though they may have a caring family and good friends. Beneath all such relationships is the sense that, if others knew about their sexuality, they would think differently about them, esteem them differently, and perhaps not accept them. Keeping this part of themselves hidden produces a sense of falseness, a lack of honesty and a phoniness, and at the same time a strong sense of shame about who they are in a very deep part of their personality.

They may feel shame simply for experiencing the same-sex attraction. This shame can be pervasive. It can isolate the person from genuine community, from a sense of belonging, even from the sense of belonging to the family of God, the church. It can affect their sense of self, including their sense of being a new self in Christ, and lead to depression and suicidal thought. This is a shame about something they did not choose and about something they did not do. It is a shame they do not deserve. Yet it is a shame that erodes their sense of well-being and their sense of love and grace. Some shame may come from behavior that is disobedient to God's law. Such shame is appropriate and needs to be removed by the cleansing that comes with confession and repentance.

Shamed persons need the very community they fear. Persons who live with the poison of shame have a deep spiritual need for community, for deep and intimate personal relationships in which they love and are loved and in which they are valued by others. They need the relationships of shared lives, relation-

ships in which they know and are known, known even in the brokenness of their sexuality, and yet are loved and valued.

### *B. Identity in community*

The church of Jesus Christ has the antidote to this shame. In the church, God gathers his people into a new community and gives them a *new* identity. Believers are a new creation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the bride of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the body of Christ. Individually they are children of God. The church has this identity because of the actual, historical reality of Christ's death and resurrection. "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). Neither who we are nor what we have done excludes us from this new community. Together we have been forgiven and accepted by God, and our shame has been taken away. In turn we must create an accepting, forgiving community of the unashamed.

As adopted children in the family of God we share these family characteristics with each other:

1. Everyone in the new community is fallen. We are all broken and weak. Each of us is a sinner, and we deserve some of the shame we have.
2. On the cross Christ bore the shame as well as the guilt of everyone in this new community. "... upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).
3. Everyone in this community participates in Christ's holiness. "And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified" (1 Cor. 6:11). We are now, by God's definition, a clean, pure, unashamed, holy community.

This new community must practice these commonalities:

1. We no longer see each other as persons who are guilty of idolatry, theft, greed, drunkenness, sexual immorality, slander, or swindling. Although that is what we were, we are now clean and holy (1 Cor. 6:11). We give up these old judgments about others.
2. Because Christ has borne the weight of our brokenness, our weaknesses, and our sins, we can acknowledge them with each other. "But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7) because "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).
3. In this community we experience the power of healing prayer, following the advice of James when he says, "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed" (James 5:16).
4. In this community we treat each other not only with justice but also with grace and mercy.

Our very humanity depends upon our connectedness. To be disconnected, isolated, alone in the universe is to lose our very humanness. We were made to live in community, and without it we die. Even broken community is better

than no community, but the best community of all is a reconciled, redeemed community where each thinks of the other as better than her/himself and where the last shall be first and the first last.

All of us have this same need, and if we do not find such community within our families and within the church, we are likely to seek it elsewhere. Persons who experience same-sex attractions sometimes seek it within the gay and lesbian communities of larger cities. The cry for acceptance voiced by many homosexual persons is a cry for community.

### C. *Assuming one's identity*

"Who am I?" is a question all people ask, especially adolescents growing into adulthood. It is a question that has deep spiritual significance. As John Calvin said in the forward to the *Institutes*, "Who am I?" and "Who is God?" are the two major spiritual questions every person must answer. He also observed that the two questions are related. No one can answer one question without answering the other.

How we label or identify ourselves often defines us. Our identity tells us to what community we belong, how we are to live, and to some extent what our purpose or meaning is. Persons who experience same-sex attractions often identify themselves in terms of this aspect of their personality, just as a person who is disabled is tempted to identify herself as "the cripple" or a person who is athletically gifted as "the athlete." Emotional impairments such as depression, schizophrenia, or uncontrolled anger have the same power to define identity. They have this power partly because of the pervasiveness of these issues in a person's life and partly because other people tend to identify certain people according to these characteristics. This tendency to reduce a person to some aspect of her or his person is dehumanizing and unchristian.

Taking on an identity may make an individual less flexible and more static than that person might otherwise be. Especially for young people, "coming out" may concretize their sexual identity while it is still being understood or being formed. Taking on a gay identity as secular culture defines it may mean the uncritical acceptance of one's desires and attractions and allowing those desires to shape behavior. Therefore, lesbian/gay/bisexual support groups that do not foster spiritual transformation and one's new identity in Christ can erode both faith and obedience.

Some persons who experience sexual attractions to others of the same gender feel a need to tell family and friends, coworkers, employers, and the community that they are gay or lesbian. There seem to be many reasons they do this:

1. To be known and accepted completely as they are.
2. To live with authenticity.
3. To find and be supported by others who have experienced similar painful struggles.
4. To raise the issue publicly, promote a positive image of homosexual persons, and engage others in discussion.

The ministry of the church to persons with same-sex attractions begins with enfolding these persons into community while at the same time sounding the message of the gospel that one's sexual identity is not one's deepest and true

identity. One's core identity must not be hostage to one's sexual identity or sexual orientation.

The enduring message of the gospel is that male or female, American or Canadian, homosexual or heterosexual, disabled or well-bodied—none of these adjectives defines who we truly are. These words describe some aspect of ourselves, but they are adjectives, not nouns. Even our moral behavior no longer defines us when we are born again in Christ. Listen carefully to the Word of God on this subject:

Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. *And this is what some of you used to be.* But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

(1 Cor. 6:9-11, NRSV, italics added)

Acknowledging the struggles and temptations and moving toward this new identity in Christ allow one to be honest, to receive the love of the Christian community, and, above all, to have hope. This is no easy task. This change of identity is part of what the Scripture calls "becoming a new person in Christ." This becoming is not an instantaneous, one-time event. It begins with an act of grace received in faith, but it is also a process. One needs to grow into this new identity so that it shapes one's self-image, one's way of thinking, one's way of responding, and one's behavior. When the church enfolds homosexual persons into its fellowship, they are empowered to live beyond their sexual identity.

#### *D. Temptation and sin*

The desire for sexual union outside of marriage is rightly understood in Christian moral teaching as temptation. There are many kinds of sexual temptations, some of them mutually exclusive. Nearly all human beings experience sexual temptations at various times in their lives, with various degrees of intensity. But temptation is not the same as desire, attraction, or even arousal. Temptation is the urge to do what we know to be wrong. Sometimes strong, sometimes persistent, sometimes seemingly irresistible, such an attraction, no matter how beautifully it is pictured and how vital it seems to our life and happiness, is an attraction to sinful behavior.

Good ministry requires that we be clear that temptation is not sin. Whether gentle and fleeting or persistent and consuming, even if it brings us to the edge of disobedience, temptation is neither sinful nor shameful. Scripture clearly teaches that our Lord was tempted in all ways even as we are; yet he did not sin.

We must be clear that temptation becomes sin only when we give some form of assent to it, some kind of yes. It is possible to sin in our hearts even when we do not bring our desires to outward actions. For temptation to give birth to sin (James 1:13-15) a person must in some way say "yes" to the sinful desire, even though it be in one's inner being.

The kind of assent can also differ. Sometimes we *fall* into sin; sometimes we *yield* to temptation; sometimes we *intentionally* and *deliberately* sin. Whatever the degree of wilfulness, sin needs both forgiveness and cleansing.

But what does a tempted person need? Scripture teaches us that a tempted person needs both strength to resist and a way of escape. In our weakness we



need to be empowered. Ephesians 6:10-18 shows the way. We do not overcome temptation. Christ has done that for us. We put on his truth and righteousness, and, when we are fully clothed with what he has done for us, “having done everything,” we stand firm. We do not fight the devil. Christ has done that for us. We are “strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.” If we struggle in our own power, we lose. If we rest in his, we can stand firm.

Believers must pray to be delivered from temptation, as modeled by the Lord’s Prayer: “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.” We need to pray as a community, the community of the tempted ones who pray for one another. We cannot stand against the fiery darts of the evil one alone. We need other Christians. We need their prayers.

Let us not be too quick to say that “God allows no one to be tempted beyond what he is able to bear.” However true, such a statement is a bit like saying to a parent who has lost a child, “All things work together for good to those who love God.” It shows an insensitivity about, a lack of empathy with, those who suffer and struggle.

#### *E. The gift of celibacy (self-control)*

In the seventh chapter of Corinthians (vv. 1, 8-9, and 32-35) the apostle Paul recommends singleness as a preferable state for Christians. These passages clearly teach that one need not be married in order to have meaning in life or to fulfill one’s purpose or role in this world. In fact, marriage is often detrimental to serving the Lord. The reasons advanced are that being married in times of great trials is very difficult and also that marriage belongs to the order of things that are passing away (Matt. 22:30 and 1 Cor. 7:29-31). When the kingdom fully comes, marriage will be no more. According to 1 Corinthians 7:29-31, those who are citizens of the kingdom begin to live in the new fellowship that replaces marriage. This Scripture passage teaches that it is not wrong to marry but that singleness is preferable.

But what are single persons to do about their sexuality? What are youth between the ages of 12 or 13 (the age of sexual maturity) and 26 or 27 (the median ages of first marriages) to do when they “burn with passion”? This is a very important question for *all* adult single persons—unmarried, divorced, or widowed—as well as for celibate homosexual persons. Persons who are homosexual, like other adult singles, often struggle intensely with their sexual drives.

For Christians the problem is compounded by Jesus’ statement to his disciples about marrying or staying single. When Jesus told them that divorce is contrary to the will of God except in instances of unfaithfulness of one spouse, the disciples responded, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” To this Jesus replied,

Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.

(Matt. 19:8-12)

Who are the ones “who can accept this”? What did our Lord mean by “only those to whom it has been given”? Is renouncing marriage (making oneself a eunuch) for the sake of the kingdom of God potentially possible for anyone?

None of these questions is answered in this passage in Matthew or the parallel passages in Mark 12 and Luke 20.

However, the apostle Paul, when speaking of married people who mutually decide to forgo sexual relations in order to devote themselves to prayer, states that they should do so for only a limited time so that Satan will not tempt them because of their “lack of self-control.” He adds, “I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind” (1 Cor. 7:7). Paul here identifies the gift necessary for celibacy as self-control.

The church has often understood these passages as teaching that some people have a gift that allows them to forgo sexual relations. Such persons may choose not to marry. What then of those who do not have such a gift, such a charisma, from God? What if marriage is not possible or not permissible for them, for whatever reasons? In particular, what about those who are sexually attracted to persons of the same sex? If marriage is not possible and they do not have the gift, or charisma, necessary to control their sexuality, what are they to do? It is this dilemma that has led many Christian writers, including many ethicists, either to allow for or to argue for a same-sex equivalent to marriage. For example, Lewis Smedes, in the revised edition of *Sex for Christians*, writes,

I still believe that the Creator intended the human family to flourish through heterosexual love. I still believe that homosexuality is a burden that homosexual people are called to bear, and bear as morally as possible, even though they never chose to bear it. I still believe that God prefers homosexual people to live in committed and faithful monogamous relationships with each other when they cannot change their condition and do not have the gift to be celibate. My mind has not changed in any basic way since I set these opinions to paper nearly two decades ago. (p. 239)

The question of what to do about one’s sexuality when marriage is not an option is no mere question of theological theory. It is, rather, a sometimes desperate question of a Christian who is homosexual, struggling to be obedient to her or his Lord. It is also an urgent pastoral concern (see Report 42, *Acts of Synod 1973*, pp. 628-31, where both the pastoral dimensions and the ethical issues are explored in detail). If a person lacks self-control but marriage is not possible, is sin then the only option?

What is this *gift*, or *charisma*, of which Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 7:7? It is commonly called the gift of celibacy. Scripture, however, nowhere speaks specifically of celibacy. Rather, in the immediate context (1 Cor. 7:5) Paul calls this ability to deny oneself sexual relationships “self-control,” saying some people have it and others lack it.

Galatians 5:22-23 speaks of self-control as one of the fruits of the Spirit: “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.” Self-control is listed along with such virtues as love, joy, peace, and gentleness among the things that are produced by the Holy Spirit in those who belong to Christ. A “fruit of the Spirit” is not the same as a “gift of the Spirit,” but some of these Christian virtues are also described as gifts, or charisma, of the Spirit. For example, in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, including the gifts of faith, hope, and love. Both love and faith are fruits of the Spirit

and gifts of the Spirit, so it is not strange for Paul to speak of a gift (self-control) that is also a fruit of the Spirit.

At the conclusion of his teaching on gifts, Paul instructs us to “strive for the spiritual gifts” (1 Cor. 14:1). We may seek them and pray for them. Gifts are not some power or special ability that God either gives or does not give to us without possibility of change. In many places in the New Testament the Holy Spirit promises to give Christians whatever they need in order to obey and serve God. Christians who lack self-control of their anger or their sexuality must seek it and ask God for it. Married people as well as singles need self-control, including self-control of their sexuality, for a well-disciplined life.

Finally, Scripture is clear that even though virtues such as love and faith are both fruits of the spirit and gifts of the Spirit, they are also commanded of us. We are called to love and to believe and are held responsible when we do not. The fact that both are gifts of the Spirit does not relieve us of responsibility. No one may argue that he is relieved from the obligation to love or to believe because he does not have that gift of the Spirit.

So, too, with self-control. It is a gift of the Spirit, one of the fruits of the Spirit, and a command to be obeyed. Scripture speaks of it in Titus 2:11-15: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to *live lives that are self-controlled*, upright, and godly. . . . Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority”; in 1 Peter 1:13: “Therefore prepare your minds for action; *discipline yourselves*; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed”; and in 2 Peter 1:5-6: “For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and *knowledge with self-control*, and self-control with endurance. . . .”

The argument that one is excused from the obligation to be sexually chaste if one does not have the gift of celibacy (or self-control) rests on questionable grounds.

How then do we learn self-control?

1. We must seek it, desire it, and pray for it, alone and with others.
2. We must believe that God gives us what we ask in Jesus’ name.
3. We must know our own weakness, know that we are fully capable of falling into sin. We must “beware when we think we stand, lest we also fall.” We must let this knowledge of weakness and vulnerability lead us to trust in God’s power.
4. We must practice self-control. Learning self-control in other aspects of our lives is a virtue that shapes our character and enables us to say no. Or, to put it differently, self-indulgence is the enemy of self-control.
5. We must learn to flee temptations like pornography, which is not only dangerous but addictive.
6. We must be accountable to fellow Christians. For example, a person striving to learn self-control should find a partner or small group with whom to meet regularly for support, prayer, and monitoring each other’s behavior.

7. We must learn to live one day at a time, for “tomorrow will bring worries of its own” (Matt. 6:34).
8. We must speak about our temptations. Hiding them and keeping secrets gives them a power that can be broken only by allowing others to bear our burdens with us.

*F. Sexual brokenness and healing*

God promises the healing of all our diseases, of whatever distorts our lives, of that which troubles our relationships, and of that which destroys shalom—whether physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. He tells us that healing and the gospel go together. The power of God is shown in changed lives, changed in all sorts of ways. When Jesus, the firstborn of the Father, came into the world, the new creation was made manifest. Those who believed in him became new people, and those who were sick were healed.

Christ commissioned the apostles (Luke 9:1-6) and later the seventy (Luke 10:8-9) to preach the gospel and heal the sick. The book of Acts repeatedly demonstrates the connection between the proclamation of the gospel and healing (e.g., Acts 3:8-12; Acts 4:29-30). Among the gifts of the spirit given to the church is the gift of healing (1 Cor. 12:9). And James commissions the church to a ministry that pairs the forgiveness of sins and healing.

All Christians experience God’s healing hand in many ways in their lives. Nearly every small illness has the potential to develop into a serious, even deadly, illness. Again and again God hears our prayers and heals us and those we love. It is, however, important to remember that God does not promise to heal us every time, from *all* our diseases and from *all* our brokenness throughout our lives. In fact, he tells us the opposite in Scripture. Some brokenness and some disease will not be healed until we come into his presence at the end of time. Some live with the pain of unhealed brokenness throughout their lives. The church must communicate all that God promises but also no more than he promises.

Sometimes healing comes as a direct answer to prayer and sometimes, perhaps most often, through the healing services of medicines, counselors, and surgeons. So, too, with sexual brokenness. We need to turn to God for healing, but he often answers our prayers through the ministry of others. An important part of the church’s ministry is the communication of hope for healing, but it must be a realistic and well-grounded hope.

Persons with same-sex attractions testify that this healing comes in many forms and to varying degrees: (1) diminished inclinations, (2) a greater measure of self-control, (3) a supportive Christian community that brings peace and wholeness into their lives, (4) strength and support in a continuing struggle throughout their lives, (5) a greater attraction to the opposite sex, (6) and in some cases the ability to marry and have a family.

All persons should be encouraged to seek whatever healing God may provide for them. They should seek it both through the common ministry of their congregations and through the specialized ministries for persons who are homosexual. Most of the specialized ministries to persons who are homosexual are related to Exodus International, a worldwide coalition of Christian ministries that offers support to men and women seeking to overcome homosexuality. Many of these ministries also offer specialized support to spouses, families, and friends. These ministries include support groups, individual counseling,

literature, and other resources. Ministries associated with Exodus International differ from one community to another, so pastors making referrals are encouraged to contact local groups and become thoroughly acquainted with them. Information about the ministry of Exodus, including a complete list of referral groups, is available from Exodus International—North America, P.O. Box 77652, Seattle, WA 98177; (206-784-7799).

#### **IV. Guidelines to evaluate ministries**

Many parachurch organizations and associations of churches now minister to people who experience same-sex desires. Obviously, this committee cannot evaluate every existing ministry. These programs range from those that are unhealthy and destructive to those ministering grace and healing. Even programs bearing the same name vary from region to region. Therefore, pastors and congregational leaders should carefully evaluate a ministry before referring a member to it.

##### *A. Common features of effective ministries include the following:*

1. Acceptance and affirmation, seeing every human being as one who is created in God's image and therefore having worth and dignity.
2. Hope for healing with an understanding that sanctification is a process and that wholeness is a lifelong journey.
3. A setting that makes intimate nonsexual relationships between people of the same and different genders possible.
4. Accountability in holy living and help in cultivating a new mindset.
5. Belief that in Jesus' resurrection God has given power to break the cycles of sinful behavior.
6. Help in dealing with anger against God, against society, and specifically against those who have hurt, abused, and misused.
7. Worship that is God-centered, joyful, and hopeful.
8. Supportive small groups in which there is healing prayer and confession of sin.

##### *B. A few cautions regarding ministries for homosexual persons*

1. Beware of ministries that promise complete or immediate change in desires and orientation.
2. Beware of ministries that offer little or no hope for change in desires or the power of those desires.
3. Beware of programs that mandate gender-specific behavior or tell participants they must learn to display certain "male" or "female" traits. In other words, beware of ministries that place any emphasis on male and female roles that have no biblical foundation.
4. Beware of ministry models that do not respect individual Christians' abilities to hear and respond to God's voice and that do not recognize people's decision-making abilities.

5. Beware of inflexible, legalistic models of ministry, for example, any ministry requiring individuals to follow a prescribed pattern of steps to ensure results.
6. Beware of ministries that too quickly identify same-sex attraction as irreversible homosexuality.

## **V. Compassionate ministry and the local church**

Referrals are no substitute for the ministry of the local congregation, and referrals are rarely successful unless they are made in the context of a compassionate church. Each congregation must do its own ministry. But what can a church do that has no specialized ministry in this area? What good news, what gospel, does it have to extend to persons who struggle with same-sex attractions?

First, the church must remember that gospel, not law, has the power to redeem our lives and make us whole. Saying no is not enough. The church must reach out with love and compassion, creating a fellowship of mutual honesty, caring, and support.

Christian ministry begins with compassion. Just as Jesus was moved by the cry of the blind man on the way to Jericho, by the widow following the body of her son, by the lepers who cried out from the crowd, and by the tears of the woman who washed his feet, so too we must first be moved in our deepest feelings by those who struggle with same-sex attractions.

Compassion is what we feel when we are in touch with the pain of others even though their situation may be very different from anything we have experienced. Compassion is born of imagination, the ability to put ourselves into their situation and know what it is really like. Only when we know our own brokenness, our own pain, and our own temptations can we begin to identify with others and feel compassion. That compassion is the motivational power for ministry. It moves us to reach out and do what we can. It also helps overcome their shame, the shame they do not deserve.

Compassionate ministry seeks to incorporate those with same-sex attractions fully into the body and life of the church, satisfying their need for community, for intimacy, for oneness with others, and their need to serve their Lord. Much of their sexual struggle lies here. What they need and what sometimes gives desperate urgency to their need is not genital sex but to love and to be loved, to know and to be known, to feel worthwhile about themselves.

Compassionate ministry begins with lifting the taboo. Love and compassion will help us overcome our apprehension about same-sex attractions or about those persons who experience sexuality this way. We need not stop our ears or avert our eyes. We must break down the conspiracy of silence and the walls of separation, which convey judgment, alienation, exclusion, and loss of hope to our brothers and sisters in Christ and to those outside of Christ who have been shut out of the church.

We must pray for all who struggle with sexual temptations, some with attraction to persons of the same sex, others to persons who are not their spouses, and still others with deep dark secrets about their sexuality and their sexual behaviors. We must speak of who we are in Christ and how little being male or female, black or white, Cuban or American, homosexual or heterosexual says about who we are. We must bear one another's burden, support one

another in the Christian life, strive to live in holy obedience, hold out hope to one another, and seek healing from all our impairments.

When we do these things, we will meet our Lord, for he has said, whatever you do to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you do to me.

## VI. What the local church can do

While many congregations will find it useful to be able to refer their members to helpful parachurch ministries, every church can minister to its attenders who experience same-sex desires. Some congregations will develop full-orbed ministries specifically designed for those who are seeking healing in the area of their sexual practice and desires. Other congregations may be able to offer a single helpful ministry in this area. Local congregations may not be able to replicate every program that the specialized ministries provide. But every congregation can create a hospitable climate and an inclusive environment for those who experience same-sex desires.

### A. *Creating a hospitable climate*

1. **Use language that assumes and describes the church community as the family of God.** The church is a new community of Jesus Christ's followers, who are single, married, and from all varieties of backgrounds. In other words, teach that the church is not simply a collection of biological families or parts of families. Because the church is a new community, it needs to provide a home, a haven, for its members.
2. **Model and encourage intimate nonsexual relationships with people of the same gender and the opposite gender,** in other words, brother-brother, sister-sister, and brother-sister relationships. Church leadership should demonstrate and refer to friendships of all sorts with all ages and both genders. Such friendships can be fostered by, but are not limited to, various small-group Bible studies, ministry teams, prayer partnerships.
3. **Provide an environment for confession of sins and accountability to other Christians.** In small-group settings as well as in public worship, provide a safe place to share struggles, confess sins.

### B. *Some practical ways to make the ministry of the whole church more inclusive of those who experience same-sex desire*

1. **In congregational prayers** include the health and well-being of the single Christians' relationships as well as the health and well-being of the congregation's marriages and families. For example, leaders could pray for faithfulness and commitment in friendships and for love and forgiveness toward housemates as well as for patience and understanding in marriage and families.
2. **During liturgical confession** refer by name to specific sins, including homosexual practice. Use Scripture and prayers that refer to the fact that Christians are tempted by, struggling with, and trapped in a variety of sins. Train liturgists/worship leaders to use language that demonstrates that every kind of sin displeases God and that no sin is beyond God's forgiveness, that God's power can break the power and the cycles of sin.

Mention sinful practices of attitude and thought as well as of behavior

and speech, including such things as gossip, slander, theft, murder, violence. Among sins confessed should be those often perceived as ordinary and mundane as well as those that may be seen as dramatic.

3. **In preaching** talk about a variety of sexual sins, including all sexual practice outside of marriage (premarital, extramarital, same-sex). Give examples of God's grace and comfort to those who struggle with brokenness and also examples of people who have been freed from the power of homosexual sin.
4. **Encourage small groups** that are made up of singles and couples, are mixed in age, or are arranged geographically in addition to or instead of small groups that are only couple-oriented, geared to singles, and/or age specific.

C. *Ministry that local churches have offered*

The following are examples of congregational ministries that some Christian Reformed members have found helpful in their struggle with same-sex desires:

1. Prayer partnerships with others within the congregation.
2. Congregational members who told the individuals that they prayed for them.
3. Biblical teaching on the sinful nature of homosexual practice, on God's forgiveness, and on God's power for the believer to resist sin.
4. Practice of and training in classic spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, corporate worship, and service.
5. A setting where it was known that other church attenders also experienced same-sex desires.

## VII. Pastoral care to families

Although the mandate given to this committee focuses on ministry to the homosexual member, there is a broader challenge to the church. The reality of homosexuality impacts not only individuals but also other family members. Parents, siblings, and spouses experience emotions that are evident in times of crisis. In the pastoral advice given in Report 42 of the *Acts of Synod 1973*, ministry to family members is included as well as ministry to homosexual persons. Ministry will be hampered if family members do not experience pastoral care from the church.

When families are confronted with the reality of a loved one's homosexuality, the struggles that ensue often involve shock, denial, anger, shame, blame, grief, heartache, and depression. The journey may be a long and lonely one if burdens cannot be shared. The church needs to respond with compassion. A church that responds with grace will more likely be able to hear and minister to the needs, fears, and concerns of the homosexual and his/her family than a church that responds with shame.

In his book *Windows of the Soul*, Ken Gire speaks of the power of story. He gives a personal illustration that speaks to how the church can also be there for family members even when there isn't complete understanding:



If a story is to follow us home, find entrance through some door of our heart, it must be asked, consciously or unconsciously, two questions: What does this story have to say? And what does it have to say to me?

A few years ago when reading Norman Maclean's story *A River Runs Through It*, I wrestled with those questions. . . . What was Norman Maclean's story saying?

It was saying, I think, that the ones we most want to help are the ones we are often least able to help. It is a story about connecting with the people closest to us, how difficult that is to do, and how heartbreaking it is when, for whatever reason, we can't seem to do it.

If that was what the story was saying, what was it saying, if anything, to me?

I read *A River Runs Through It* at a time when I was trying to connect with someone I lived with and loved and should have understood but suddenly didn't, with someone I wanted with all my heart to help but even with all my heart, couldn't. It filled me with grief and sadness and questions like ones the father asked his son in Norman Maclean's story.

"Are you sure you have told me everything you know about his death?" he asked.

"Everything."

"It's not much, is it?"

"No," I replied, "but you can love completely without complete understanding."

"That I have known and preached," my father said.

When I read those words, it was as if the father had preached them to me.

"*You can love completely without complete understanding.*" The words echoed in me as if off the walls of an empty cathedral in which I was the only person sitting in the pews.

It was not required of me to understand. It was required of me to love, and to go on loving, completely. (pp. 78-80)

Loving even when we do not completely understand—may that be our attitude as the church ministers to family members as well, helping them to love completely without complete understanding, and loving them completely even when we are without complete understanding.

#### A. *Role of the pastor*

The pastor is key to effective church ministry. Pastors are in a position to instruct their congregations and to alert members and officeholders to the responsibility they bear toward homosexual persons in their fellowship. Pastors need to prepare their congregations to minister to serious needs. They have the opportunity to help create empathy among the members. Pastors may be limited in how much time they can personally spend in one-to-one contacts, but they should be able to put people in touch with resources as well as with two or three people who will walk with the hurting family members.

Authentic community needs not only to be taught but also to be caught—that is, to be modeled by pastors. Pastors should also encourage an understanding of and compassion for homosexual persons, while dispelling prejudices under which they suffer. One way to do so is through preaching and encouraging the use of resources for reflection, discussion, and study in small groups. One example of an excellent resource is *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World* by Dr. Richard Mouw. This is an excellent book for those who wish to know how it is possible to hold on to their convictions and still dialogue with and show Christian love to those with whom they differ. Mouw writes, "It is important to distinguish between beliefs and behaviors with which we disagree and the very real human beings who believe and behave in those ways. We need to be very clear about our disagreements without responding irrationally to homosexual persons" (pp. 87-88).

Mouw stresses in another place that “the whole point of the biblical perspective is to promote a sexuality that is kind and reverent. So it is important that we present the biblical viewpoint kindly and reverently to those with whom we disagree about sexual standards. Not to do so is to undermine our own message. Sexual civility is an important way of living out our commitment to the gospel” (p. 94).

Another resource is the Pastoral Message from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Its pastoral recommendations are given here:

With a view toward overcoming the isolation that you or your son or daughter may be experiencing, we offer these recommendations to you as well as to priests and pastoral ministers.

*To parents:*

1. Accept and love yourselves as parents in order to accept and love your son or daughter. Do not blame yourselves for a homosexual orientation in your child.
2. Do everything possible to continue demonstrating love for your child. However, accepting his or her homosexual orientation does not have to include approving all related attitudes and behavioral choices. In fact, you may need to challenge certain aspects of a lifestyle which you find objectionable.
3. Urge your son or daughter to stay joined to the . . . faith community. If they have left the church, urge them to return and be reconciled to the community . . .
4. Recommend that your son or daughter find a spiritual director/mentor who will offer guidance in prayer and in leading a chaste and virtuous life.
5. Seek help for yourself, perhaps in the form of counseling or spiritual direction, as you strive for understanding, acceptance and inner peace. Also, consider joining a parents’ support group or participating in a retreat designed for [Christian] parents of homosexual children. Other people have traveled the same road as you, but may have journeyed even further. They can share effective ways of handling delicate family situations such as how to tell family members and friends about your child, how to explain homosexuality to younger children, how to relate to your son or daughter’s friends in a Christian way.
6. Reach out in love and service to other parents who may be struggling with a son or daughter’s homosexuality. Contact your parish about organizing a parents’ support group. . . .
7. As you take advantage of opportunities and support, remember that you can only change yourself; you can only be responsible for your own beliefs and actions, not those of your adult children.
8. Put your faith completely in God, who is more powerful, more compassionate and more forgiving than we are or ever could be.

(pp. 290-91)

*To church ministers:*

1. Be available to parents and families who ask for your pastoral help, spiritual guidance and prayer.
2. Welcome homosexual persons into the faith community. Seek out those on the margins. Avoid stereotyping and condemnations. Strive first to listen. Do not presume that all homosexual persons are sexually active.
3. Learn about homosexuality and church teaching so that your preaching, teaching and counseling will be informed and effective.
4. Use the words *homosexual*, *gay*, *lesbian* in honest and accurate ways, especially from the pulpit. In various and subtle ways you can give people “permission” to talk about homosexual issues among themselves and let them know that you’re also willing to talk with them.

5. Maintain a list of agencies, community groups and counselors or other experts to whom you can refer homosexual persons or their parents and family members when they ask you for specialized assistance. Recommend agencies that operate in a manner consistent with [church] teaching.
6. Help to establish or promote existing support groups for parents and family members.
7. Learn about HIV / AIDS so you will be more informed and compassionate in your ministry. Include prayers in the liturgy for those living with HIV / AIDS, their caregivers, those who have died, and their families, companions and friends. . . .

(p. 291)

As pastors become aware of such guidance and intentionally speak, teach, and model the core ideas mentioned here, family members will be encouraged and strengthened as well.

### *B. A circle of support*

Families need support. This should be a small group, a place where they can be completely open. This support group can blunt the sting and share the burden. The complexity of issues and emotions that are dealt with by family members will require ongoing support.

Families may not have the opportunity to make the choice of “coming out.” The homosexual member may already have made that decision for the family. Because family structures vary, cultural implications must also be taken into account. Various ethnic groups may deal with the issue of homosexuality differently.

Confidentiality is absolutely essential when family members share their burden with others. This confidentiality must not be broken.

### *C. Continuing ministry*

A continuing ministry is necessary for families, especially if their loved ones continue to live openly in a same-sex relationship. It is often hard enough for family members to share with others that a loved one has a homosexual orientation. This becomes even more complex if that loved one is engaged in explicit homosexual practices. Sometimes churches have been helpful in shouldering the burden of family members who are initially trying to come to terms with the sexuality of their loved one. However, long-term sustaining support is often lacking, especially if little or no change is seen in the loved one’s condition or behavior. The circle of support may then narrow to include only those who are willing to commit to the family for an extended period of time.

Family members often feel ill at ease about how to address a number of situations. Are they to inquire about their loved one’s sexual activities? If so, how? What if the family member wants to have a friend or partner come along on the family vacation? What if the loved one has gone through years of counseling and finally agonizes to the conclusion that his / her orientation is unalterable? How do family members decide what level of friendship is acceptable for their loved one? Should family members shun friends or partners of their loved one, or should they interact with them as they would with friends of another family member? These can be real issues with which families struggle. When the church provides a long-term sustaining presence, regardless of the outcome, it demonstrates the unconditional love of Christ.

Some Christians do not support a homosexual person's family members who attend their church if the homosexual person shows any sign of developing a relationship with a same-sex friend. They believe that if they show any sign of understanding or compassion to the individual or even to that individual's family members, they are condoning the behavior and therefore participating in the sin. This perspective lacks an appropriate idea of boundaries. Individuals can be a supportive presence for family members even if they don't agree with all of the decisions that are made. By acknowledging the complexity of the issue, they can empathize with the burden family members experience and can walk with them instead of shunning or shaming them.

Ministry to family members over a long period of time will begin to realign the family members' focus so that they will be able to move on eventually. Over time, the fact that their loved one is homosexual will not be the all-consuming focus of their lives. However, even after years have passed, there may be times when family members will need to talk. Members of the support group need to be sensitive to those times and should from time to time initiate the subject by asking, "How is it going? How are you doing?"

The church may provide ministry through the establishment of small groups (in some churches these are called I.C.U.'s—Intensive Care Units). Members of such groups commit to confidentiality and long-term support if necessary. Membership in an I.C.U. must be voluntary for successful ministry.

Family dynamics are different from family to family, but it is not uncommon for tensions to arise within the family because of differences about how to respond to or interact with a homosexual loved one. It is not uncommon that families become polarized, one part of the family taking a hardline, condemning stance, another part of the family taking the other extreme in hopes of keeping the peace of all the family members at whatever cost. Such intrafamily tension may result in temporary or, at times, long-term periods of distance or even of estrangement in relationships. The body of Christ must be willing to show compassion and to foster a spirit of love and understanding when there is family disunity.

Families dealing with homosexuality may need support groups and may also need guidance in their choices. Family members often pass through a maze of circumstances about which decisions have to be made. A listening, supportive presence can help family members think through the situation. Oftentimes having a listening ear can help family members come to decisions with which they feel comfortable.

Family members also may struggle with their relationship with God, especially if there is little or no evidence of behavioral change in their loved one. Believers who are aware of this struggle should take the initiative to ask family members from time to time how this situation has affected or is affecting their relationship with God. There is a variety of pastoral approaches that can be implemented in helping family members work through periods of anger or disillusionment with God.

Though most of the literature on homosexuality speaks of situations involving a son/daughter or brother/sister, there are also instances when a spouse discovers that his/her life partner is gay. These are particularly difficult situations because they involve the breaking of trust. Issues of autonomy and mutuality are also affected. The dynamics of these complex situations often differ, depending upon whether there are children born to the couple and

whether this discovery is revealed in a gradual way or through a crisis situation. Sometimes the homosexual person may wish to remain married. Most often professional help is needed in such situations because of the depth of the hurt and brokenness of the relationship. Anita Worthen and Bob Davies in *Someone I Love Is Gay: How Family and Friends Can Respond* specifically address common issues that arise in such cases.

#### *D. Haunting fears*

In all families touched by homosexuality, there are overwhelming fears that grip the hearts of parents, siblings, and spouses. One of these is the fear that the homosexual loved one may be or may become infected with the HIV virus and develop AIDS. This fear is very real and may grow if the loved one continues to be sexually active. The ache and terror are insistent. Families need accurate information concerning this issue. It is important that family members learn how HIV is transmitted and how it is not transmitted, the stages of HIV disease, various treatments, and the side effects of such treatments.

Another fear is for the spiritual health of the loved one. Some family members may question whether their loved one is in a right relationship with the Lord. Others may wonder how or when they may be able to speak about their spiritual concerns with their loved one. If there is a deep concern about the eternal welfare of their loved one, how can this be addressed without alienating their relationship? These sensitive matters will require thoughtful and prayerful consideration by family members and by those who are willing to support them through this journey. Remembering God's unconditional love and irresistible grace can be of comfort and support as conversations about spiritual health and welfare are held with loved ones.

#### *E. A healing ministry*

For many families the homosexuality of a loved one can become an all-consuming focus. Some family members have difficulty in focusing on other aspects of life. The healing ministry of the church involves helping family members come to terms with and transcend their loved one's situation. To the extent that the church family can empathize and support family members, healing in the form of release from shame can occur, and a sense of shalom can be restored. This does not mean that all issues will be resolved for families with homosexual loved ones. It does mean, however, that family members can come to a point of transcending the situation and finding some meaning and purpose in living through this experience. For some this may mean getting to know their son/daughter, their brother/sister, or even their spouse on a deeper, more authentic level than ever before. Others have shared that through their experience they were able to get to know and support those who have had a similar experience. Sometimes family members transcend this situation by getting the opportunity to tell their story in an educative way to others. Some family members may even become involved in starting a support ministry for family members in their church or local community. Families can be helped to move on, to find gratitude in their lives again, and to give themselves to others again. There is a sense of healing and release in embracing the knowledge that God knows and lifts up those who are brokenhearted.

### E. Concluding prayer

It does not take complete understanding and outstanding expertise to minister to family members of a homosexual person. Sometimes those who know their own brokenness are in the best position to walk alongside of these family members. We can learn much from each other, and God can use all persons, broken though they are, as vehicles of his grace. As William E. Amos, Jr., once wrote, "God has chosen the fragile vessels of people to be vehicles of grace and messengers of God's ministering presence and mercy" (*When AIDS Comes to Church*, p. 29).

As we think of the struggle of family members to come to terms with and transcend the reality of a loved one's homosexuality, we are reminded again of how each of us needs humbly to ask for God's guidance. Ken Gire gives us this prayer as a guide:

Please God,

Reveal to me through stories something of what it is like to walk around in someone else's shoes. Show me something about myself in the stories I read, something that needs changing, a thought or feeling or attitude. Deliver me from myself, O God, and from the parochial and sometimes prejudiced views I have of other people, other nations, other races, other religions. Enlarge my heart with a story, and change me by the characters I meet there. May some of the light from their lives spill over into mine, giving illumination where there was once ignorance, interest where there was once indifference, understanding where there was once intolerance, compassion where there was once contempt. . . . (p. 82)

## VIII. Justice issues

### A. Justice and grace

In its mission statement the Christian Reformed Church pledges,

As people called by God . . .  
We pursue God's justice and peace  
In every area of life.

As a closing section to this report, we ask the church to reflect on the pursuit of God's justice and peace with respect to homosexuality.

Why is this emphasis in our mission statement? Put simply, we serve a God who is just. Actually, God *loves* justice! He *is* righteous! He wills for his creations that which is right and true and fair. Scripture proclaims and echoes this from start to finish:

"For I the Lord love justice." (Isa. 61:8)

For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds . . . (Ps. 11:7)

"The Rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are just.  
A faithful God, without deceit, just and upright is he." (Deut. 32:4)

And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty,  
your judgments are true and just!" (Rev. 16:7)

Justice and righteousness are at the very heart of God. They should also be at the very heart of his imagebearers. Scripture proclaims this loudly:

But let justice roll down like waters, and  
righteousness like an everflowing stream. (Amos 5:24)

They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. . . . Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For [you] tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. (Matt. 23:4, 23)

Scripture repeatedly characterizes God as epitomizing justice and righteousness and repeatedly calls us to reflect God in these attributes as we deal with others.

It is worthy of note that in Scripture, companion words are regularly paired with the word *justice*. For example, the word *righteousness* is often nearby, if not parallel with *justice*, and that combination feels sensible. Righteousness underlines justice, or at least our sense of what true justice is. However, there are also companion words to the word *justice* that seem less sensible: *love*, *kindness*, *mercy*, and *faith*, for example, or even our mission statement's word: *peace*. What are we to make of these?

We know, of course. We know that if God were *only* just, or *simply* just, if God delivered only what we deserve, not one of us would be available for the business of reflecting him! For we are sinners—all of us—and “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Thank God that “he does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities” (Ps. 103:10). Thank God that he has given us his gracious and free gift: “eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

In other words, God adds something to justice, something amazing, something utterly mysterious, something impossible for us to comprehend, because it runs counter to our imperfect sense of justice, something unfathomably merciful, something called grace. God gives us the mercy we do not deserve. And, once again, God calls us, the recipients of his lavish grace and mercy, to reflect him:

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:36)

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic. 6:8)

“ . . . justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practiced. . . .” (Luke 11:42)

This is the Word of the Lord.

### B. Working toward justice and grace

When we ask how we can apply these concepts of justice and grace to the way we minister to and with persons who are homosexuals, we hear echoes of *both justice and grace* in the following Pastoral Guidelines, to which we committed ourselves in 1973:

- a. Homosexuality (male and female) is a condition of disordered sexuality that reflects the brokenness of our sinful world and for which the homosexual may himself bear only a minimal responsibility.
- b. The homosexual may not, on the sole ground of his sexual disorder, be denied community acceptance, and, if he is a Christian, he is to be wholeheartedly received by the church as a person for whom Christ died.
- c. Homosexuality—as explicit homosexual practice—must be condemned as incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture.
- d. The church must exercise the same patient understanding of and compassion for the homosexual in his sins as for all other sinners. The gospel of God's

grace in Christ is to be proclaimed to him as the basis of his forgiveness, the power of his renewal, and the source of his strength to lead a sanctified life. As all Christians in their weaknesses, the homosexual must be admonished and encouraged not to allow himself to be defeated by lapses in chastity, but rather, to repent and thereafter to depend in fervent prayer upon the means of grace for power to withstand temptation.

- e. In order to live a life of chastity in obedience to God's will the homosexual needs the loving support and encouragement of the church. The church should therefore so include him in its fellowship that he is not tempted by rejection and loneliness to seek companionship in a "gay world" whose godless lifestyle is alien to a Christian.
- f. Homosexuals, especially in their earlier years, should be encouraged to seek such help as may effect their sexual reorientation and the church should do everything in its power to help the homosexual overcome his disorder. Members of the churches should understand that many homosexuals, who might otherwise seek therapeutic aid, are deterred from doing so by the fear of detection and consequent ostracism. Christian acceptance and support can in all such cases be a means toward healing and wholeness. On the other hand, to those who are not healed and who must accept the limitations of their homosexuality, the church must minister in the same spirit as when it ministers to all who are not married.
- g. Christians who are homosexual in their orientation are like all Christians called to discipleship and the employment of their gifts in the cause of the kingdom. They should recognize that their sexuality is subordinate to their obligation to live in wholehearted surrender to Christ. By the same token, churches should recognize that their homosexual members are fellow-servants of Christ who are to be given opportunity to render within the offices and structures of the congregation the same service that is expected from heterosexuals. The homosexual member must not be supposed to have less the gift of self-control in the face of sexual temptation than does the heterosexual. The relationship of love and trust within the congregation should be such that in instances where a member's sexual propensity does create a problem, the problem can be dealt with in the same way as are problems caused by the limitations and disorders of any other member.
- h. It is the duty of pastors to be informed about the condition of homosexuality and the particular problems of the homosexual in order that the pastor may minister to his need and to the need of others, such as parents, who may be initially involved in the problems of homosexuality. The pastor is also in a position to instruct his congregation in appropriate ways about homosexuality and to alert members and office holders to the responsibility they bear toward homosexuals in the fellowship. He can encourage an understanding of and compassion for persons who live with this sexual disorder, and dispel the prejudices under which they suffer.
- i. The church should promote good marriages, and healthy family life in which relations between husband and wife and between parents and children are such that the psychological causes that may contribute to sexual inversion are reduced to a minimum. Parents should be encouraged to seek Christian counsel and help when they see signs of disordered sexual maturation in their children.
- j. Institutions and agencies associated with the church that are in a position to contribute to the alleviation of the problem of homosexuality are encouraged to do so by assisting ministers to become better informed, by offering counseling services to the homosexual and his family, and by generally creating a Christian attitude in the churches as well as in society as a whole.
- k. The church should speak the Word of God prophetically to a society and culture which glorifies sexuality and sexual gratification. It should foster a wholesome appreciation of sex and expose and condemn the idolatrous sexualism and the current celebration of homosexualism promoted in literature, the theater, films, television, advertisements, and the like.

*(Acts of Synod 1973, pp. 51-53)*



Justice is a very broad landscape, and its terrain is difficult. There are more questions than answers here, and several factors militate against our being just. As humans, we have a natural inclination to look for simple and quick answers to difficult and emotional issues, and this tendency can lead to a premature drawing of lines and a lack of compassion in our responses. Besides, many heterosexuals have a natural tendency to feel uncomfortable when dealing with anything homosexual. This natural unease is augmented by the way Scripture speaks of homosexual acts. The Bible we read and value as our rule for faith and life speaks plainly and harshly about homosexual acts. This fact tends to make it difficult for some even to imagine being helpful toward homosexuals and understanding of their issues. Furthermore, we are surrounded by raucous demonstrations of homosexuality: gay-pride parades, in-your-face homosexuality, highly inflamed confrontations between gays and antigay crusaders. All of these things can make it very tempting to steer clear of anything homosexual. As Reformed Christians we have attempted to be slower to draw lines, more understanding of gray areas, less interested in making quick judgments. We are gifted by God with intellectual honesty, committed by the hope within us to becoming more and more comfortable with being uncomfortable. We are a people committed to reflecting God's justice and mercy.

When issues of justice for gays and lesbians are put before us as citizens, what is actually at issue? Often the issues are human-rights issues or equity issues: the political, civil, and social rights of every citizen.

Political rights safeguard the ability of citizens to take part in and be responsible for the political direction of a country. Civil rights protect freedoms such as freedom of speech, religion, association, and so forth, by the state or by other bodies of society. Social rights ensure access to such essentials as housing, adequate food, employment, income, health care, and education.

(“Legal Equality: A Public Justice Response to Discrimination against Gays and Lesbians,” CJL Foundation 1996, p. 4)

Which of these would we want to deny to homosexual persons? On what basis? Would our being proactive for a kind of justice for persons with whom we have large disagreements be seriously misunderstood? Would that be a problem? If so, to whom?

These kinds of scenarios are not usually simple. Often they are, or feel to us as though they are, part of a larger political gay/lesbian agenda. Perhaps that is true. Perhaps if we give an inch, we will lose a mile. Perhaps. But shouldn't we entrust the future to the God who holds it and who calls us to “do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with our God”?

We have different views on the subject of homosexuality. Emotionally charged issues tend to bring quick reactions, personal attacks, threats to secede, and so forth. But Scripture says, “You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness” (James 1:19-20). As Christians we must learn to exercise justice and grace when we disagree.

Attitudes soften when people can present their views without being interrupted, when a person's reasons for adopting certain beliefs are truly heard. Often other people are driven by life experiences far different from our own. Can we calm down enough to hear the stories of others? Can we listen to each other without simply looking to win a debate?

In the present atmosphere, it is possible for people to lose their livelihood when they espouse a view on homosexuality different from that of the majority. Sometimes a more accepting view has developed reluctantly when one's own child is gay. How should we deal with such differences in a way that is just and gracious? Are divergent views intolerable in this area? Is this the place where the line must be drawn for the sake of orthodoxy and job security?

Many of us may never have a significant and personal emotional experience with homosexuality. We may never have a family member or close acquaintance challenge us to carefully review what we thought were simple issues, simple distinctions. However, we may sometime be part of the leadership of a church or classis where significant situations regarding homosexuality arise, situations that feel quite personal to us.

## **IX. Recommendations**

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Dr. Melvin Hugen, Rev. Mary-Lee Bouma, and Rev. Herman Van Niejenhuis (Dr. Gerald Zandstra, alternate).
- B. That synod recommend this report with its appendices to the churches for their use in ministering to persons with same-sex attractions.
- C. That synod make the report available to the churches in a suitable form.
- D. That synod dismiss the committee.

Committee to Give Direction about and for  
Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members

Rose Alons  
Mary-Lee Bouma  
Cornelius J. De Boer  
David H. Engelhard (ex officio)  
Melvin D. Hugen, chairman  
Christian (Yong-Ju) Oh  
Herman Van Niejenhuis  
Robert Van Noord  
Gerald L. Zandstra

*Note:* John Kreeft faithfully served on our committee until his sudden death in January 1998.

## Appendix A Resources

### I. Reading materials

#### A. For persons struggling with same-sex attractions

##### 1. Books

Davies, Bob, and Lori Rentzel. *Coming out of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men and Women*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993. (This book is a practical guide for persons struggling with same-sex desires. It has much to say both to those who think controlling or leaving homosexuality can be easily done and to those who reject the possibility altogether. It offers realistic expectations and dozens of practical and authentic suggestions for helping people change their lives.)

Oates, Wayne E. *Temptation: A Biblical and Psychological Approach*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. (Wayne Oates is a leading scholar in pastoral care and the psychology of religion. In this small book, he addresses the meaning and management of temptation. The biblical references and the chapter on "Overcoming Temptation" are especially useful.)

van den Aardweg, Gerald J. M. *The Battle for Normality: A Guide for (Self-) Therapy for Homosexuality*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997. (The author, a Roman Catholic psychotherapist with thirty years experience, writes this practical guide from a psychological perspective rather than a religious one. His method and its outcomes are well documented in the research of dozens of other therapists on the medical faculties of universities around the world over the past sixty years.)

##### 2. Articles

Lucas, Jim. "Five Years Later," *Perspectives* (April 1997).

Stewart Van Leeuwen, Mary. "Asking Better Questions in the Homosexuality Debates," *Perspectives* (April 1997).

#### B. For families and friends of homosexual persons

##### 1. Books

Dew, Robb Forman. *The Family Heart: A Memoir of When Our Son Came Out*. New York: Ballantine, 1994. (This book details a mother's journey especially well. Though she ends with a different position from our own denominational stance, this work captures one family's experience and gives insight into some of the perceptions and struggles that occur when a family member comes out of the closet.)

Johnson, Barbara. *Stick a Geranium in Your Hat and Be Happy*. New York: Inspirational Press, 1990. (Barbara Johnson is the founder of a nonprofit organization designed to "peel parents off the ceiling with a spatula of love and begin them on the road to recovery." Barbara Johnson's books are wonderfully encouraging, written in a straightforward manner, and sprinkled with humor. Barbara continues to write and minister to families ravaged by brokenness.)

—. *Where Does a Mother Go to Resign?* Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1979.

Smalley, Gary, and John Trent. *The Blessing*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986. (This book includes an important section for adults on repairing relationships with their parents.)

Swindall, Charles R. *How to Avoid Stress Fractures*. Portland: Multnomah, 1990. (Although the subject of this book is not homosexuality, it addresses all kinds of situations that bring stress and pain into our lives. As the book states: "We need to be lifted above the heat, noise, and confusion to catch a fresh glimpse of our status, our resources, our defenses, our hope and our destiny." This is a biblical and practical guide with "some answers that cannot fail to bring you relief.")

Worthen, Anita, and Bob Davies. *Someone I Love Is Gay: How Family and Friends Can Respond*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996. (This book is filled with biblically grounded guidance distilled from years of personal experience of ministry to persons with same-sex attractions and their loved ones. The advice is practical, credible, and compassionate.)

## 2. Articles

"God Loves Our Gay Son." *The Banner*, 11 April 1994, 12-13.

National Council of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Marriage and Family.

"Always Our Children: Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers." *Origins: CNS Documentary Service*, 9 October 1997, 285-91.

## C. Biblical studies

Schmidt, Thomas E. *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexual Debate*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994. (Those interested in exploring the meaning of disputed biblical texts about same-sex behaviors will find this book a careful, thorough, and searching work—far and away the best book of its kind. Schmidt addresses the interpretations of Bailey, Boswell, McNiell, Pronk, and many others in a well-documented exegetical study. He writes clearly and with deep empathy.)

Siker, Jeffrey S., ed. *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.

Stott, John. *Same-Sex Partnerships? A Christian Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revel, 1998. (This little book begins with a review of four key biblical texts and the contemporary challenges to their common interpretations. Stott then responds to five arguments commonly advanced in favor of same-sex relationships. He speaks with wisdom and grace as well as hope and compassion.)

## D. General/miscellaneous

Alexander, Marilyn Bennett, and James Preston. *We Were Baptized Too*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996. (This book will help the church recognize that Christians with same-sex attractions aren't strangers "out there" somewhere—they are our beloved sisters and brothers in Christ. While many will not agree with some of the conclu-

sions drawn, this book may help people to empathize with the reality of homosexuality among believers.)

Bawer, Bruce. *A Place at the Table*. New York: Poseidon Press, 1993.

Dallas, Joe. *Desires in Conflict*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1991.

—. *A Strange Delusion*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1996.

Douma, Timothy. *Cleaning Out the Closet before It Fills with Skeletons*. D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2000. Copies can be ordered through Loop Christian Ministries, 407 S. Dearborn, Suite 240, Chicago, IL 60605. E-mail: tim@loopchurch.org; Telephone: 312-427-7962. This is an extended case study of one congregation's attempt to deal with issues surrounding homosexuality with integrity and grace.

Gaide, Beth Ann, ed. *Congregations Talking about Homosexuality*. Bethesda, Md.: The Alban Institute, 1998.

*Homosexuality: Seeking the Guidance of the Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformed Church in America, 1998. (This is a five-part study for small groups or church-education classes. The last half of this publication is an appendix that details the synodical statements and decisions made regarding homosexuality in the Reformed Church in America from 1978 to the present. Available from RCA Distribution Center. Phone: 1-800-968-7221.)

Mouw, Richard J. *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992. (See especially Chapter 7, "How to Be Civil about Sex," pp. 81-96. This excellent work shows how to combine a civil outlook with a "passionate intensity" about our convictions. It aims at a convicted civility.)

Smedes, Lewis. *Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

Wilson, Sandra D. *Released from Shame*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

## II. Developing a church ministry

### A. Use of language

The language one uses in ministry or even in developing a plan for ministry sets the tone in important ways. Of course, all derogatory words must be avoided, but even words such as *gay*, *lesbian*, and *homosexuals* carry meanings and connotations that the church may wish to avoid. The designation "persons with same-sex attractions" is preferable.

This change puts the issue into its proper place. The terms *gay* or *lesbian* describe the person and usually refer to a personal identity. Since the phrase *persons who have same-sex attractions* describes something about their sexuality, it places such persons in the category of all humans. It describes something problematic about their sexuality; however, all humans have sexual problems of one sort or another. No one's sexuality escapes the distorting effects of sin. None of us has a sexuality that functions as it was meant to be.

The phrase *persons with same-sex attractions* also avoids some of the stereotypes and connotations that *gay* or *lesbian* carry with them. Persons who have same-sex attractions cover the full range of humankind: young and old, moral and promiscuous, deeply pious and secular, and ordinary and flamboyant. These attractions can be mild and fleeting or strong and persistent. They can coexist with opposite-sex attractions or be exclusive.

Attractions or inclinations can be acted upon or denied. The consequences of such attractions are not inevitable. The Bible nowhere speaks of same-sex attractions. The passages that speak of homosexuality use words that describe same-sex behaviors and always assume that persons have control over their behaviors. This distinction is important when speaking of ministry to persons who live with such sexual temptations.

### *B. Models of ministry*

“Harvest” is a ministry associated with the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and is endorsed by the Philadelphia Presbytery of the PCA. This ministry stresses Bible study, small groups, and person-to-person contacts. Congregations who are exploring various models of ministry can contact Harvest at 7834 Oxford Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19111. Phone: 215-342-7114.

“New Creation Ministries” has developed a structured program that stresses healing through relationships, particularly with mature Christians who form an encourager/friend relationship with a person struggling with same-sex attractions. Personal spiritual growth is central to the program, beginning with an honest search of one’s inner fears, angers, hurts, and fantasies. New Creation Ministries, P.O. Box 5451, Fresno, CA 93755-5451. Phone: 562-531-6820.

The Immanuel Reformed Church (RCA, Rev. Ken Korver, pastor) of Paramount, California, has developed a congregation-based ministry to persons with same-sex attractions. Immanuel, a congregation of three thousand members, began this ministry several years ago and has integrated it with the other ministries of their church. Contact them for a description of this ministry. Immanuel Reformed Church, 15941 Virginia Avenue, Paramount, CA 90723. Phone: 562-532-6820.

### *C. Sermons*

Beelen, David. “Pastoral Advice.” Delivered November 19, 1995. Madison Square Christian Reformed Church, 1434 Madison Avenue S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49507. Phone: 616-245-7791.

Bouma, Mary-Lee. “Good and Gay” (Gen. 1 and 1 Cor. 6:1-20). Delivered April 29, 1999. University Church, 211 W. Broomfield, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858. Phone: 989-772-0664.

—. “What Does the Bible Say about Homosexuality?” Delivered September 9, 1997. University Church, 211 W. Broomfield, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858. Phone: 989-772-0664.

Douma, Timothy H. “God, Sex, and You” (1 Cor. 6:12-20). Delivered March 8, 1992. Loop Christian Ministries, 407 S. Dearborn, Suite 240, Chicago, IL 60605. Phone: 312-427-7962. E-mail: tim@loopchurch.org.

Kelderman, Duane K. “Same-Sex ‘Marriage’: Yes or No?” Delivered November 3, 1996. Calvin Theological Seminary, 3233 Burton Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49546. E-mail: dkelderman@calvin.edu.

Mast, Stanley. “God Gave Them Over to Unnatural Desires” (Rom. 1:24-32). Delivered October 11, 1998. LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church, 107 LaGrave Avenue, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. Phone: 616-454-7204.

### III. Considerations in choosing a counselor/therapist

Individuals may seek the services of a professional counselor or therapist when struggling with same-sex attractions; when experiences begin to include anxiety, depression, or other clinical symptoms; or when support, advice, or counsel is needed by a family member of an individual with same-sex attractions.

Choosing the right counselor or therapist can be difficult at times, but there are ways of becoming connected with the right person if some consideration is given in advance to factors that help produce the correct “fit.”

#### A. Considerations for pastors, physicians, and others who recommend mental health professionals to individuals or families

Learn the following about the professionals to whom you may refer others for counseling or therapy:

1. Training and credentials—including graduate education and internship or other supervised field work.
2. Amount of professional experience and in what settings.
3. Licensure or certification and standing with the licensure/certification board.
4. Professional organization membership.
5. Specialty areas and specific training in them.
6. General theoretical orientation—how does she/he view the counseling/therapy process?
7. Perspective on and orientation toward the religious belief system of a client *vis-à-vis* the therapy process.

#### B. Considerations for individuals seeking a counselor/therapist

1. Choose a counselor/therapist who:
  - a. Will respect and work within your personal value and belief system, including your religious belief system.
  - b. Listens closely, attends well, shows interest in you, and conveys that you are the focus of attention for the entire time you are together.
  - c. Is licensed or certified by the state or province—professionals who have obtained licensure or certification and have met the minimum requirements for credentials and training of the state or province in which you reside. You can confirm licensure or certification and check whether any complaints have been filed against a given practitioner with the state or provincial board of licensure or regulation.
  - d. Has membership in professional organizations. Those who are members of international, national, and regional professional organizations typically have been granted membership on the basis of strong or stringent education and training criteria
  - e. Is willing to have you interview and ask questions of him/her. Feel free to interview several practitioners, if necessary, until you find the right match. Your prospective counselor or therapist should be able to talk openly and nondefensively about her/his training, credentials, experience, theoretical orientation, areas of expertise, beliefs about mental health distress, and how she/he works with clients.

2. Expect and demand high ethical standards and practices of the therapist, particularly regarding issues of confidentiality and any form of physical contact.
3. Be aware of and use your own sense and “feeling” about the practitioner. How you feel toward the counselor/therapist is important. Do you feel that this person is someone you can trust? Do you feel a basic sense of liking toward them? Is this someone you will likely be able to feel comfortable and at ease with?
4. Consider the physical setting in which you would be doing your therapy work. Is it private and confidential? Is it comfortable for you? Does it seem conducive to positive therapy work?
5. Remember that you may ask any question that would help you determine if a certain counselor or therapist is a good match. For example:
  - a. What is your understanding of Scripture as it relates to same-sex attractions?
  - b. Are you willing to establish specific goals with me for my counseling?
  - c. What experience do you have in working with issues like mine?
  - d. Are you on the provider list for my insurance plan?

#### IV. Resource persons

Alons, Rose. Mrs. Alons is willing to serve as a resource to families who are struggling with the homosexuality of a family member or friend. Mrs. Rose Alons, 3435 North 49th Place, Sheboygan, WI 53083. Phone: 920-457-9440.

Bouma, Mary-Lee. Rev. Bouma is willing to serve as a consultant to congregations in their ministry to people with same-sex attractions. She will also speak on “Pastoral Care for those with Same-Sex Attractions” and “Understanding What the Bible Says about Homosexuality.” University Church, 211 W. Broomfield, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858. Phone: 989-772-0664.

Douma, Timothy. Dr. Douma is willing to serve as a consultant to churches in their ministry to members with same-sex attractions. Loop Christian Ministries, 637 S. Dearborn, Chicago, IL 60605. Phone: 312-427-7962. E-mail: tim@loopchurch.org.

Hugen, Melvin. Dr. Hugen is willing to serve as a consultant to congregations developing a ministry to persons with same-sex attractions. He will also speak on “Interpretation of the Biblical Texts” and “Ministry to Persons with Same-Sex Attractions.” Calvin Theological Seminary, 3233 Burton Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49546. Phone: 616-942-0001.

## Appendix B Biological and Psychological Issues

### I. Summary of biological research

Since 1973, biological research into homosexuality has looked into the following areas: possible differences in brain structure between heterosexuals and homosexuals, genes that might be associated with homosexuality, possible inheritance patterns of homosexuality, and prenatal hormone influences.



The most widely discussed work involving brain structures was that of Simon LeVay, who in 1991 reported on a comparison of certain brain-stem structures of nineteen homosexual men who had died of AIDS, sixteen heterosexual men (six of whom had died of AIDS), and six heterosexual women (one of whom had died of AIDS). He found that the third interstitial nucleus of the hypothalamus (INAH3) of homosexual males was on average structurally more like that of heterosexual females than like that of heterosexual males. This was not the first report of a possible difference in brain structure in homosexuals, but it captured much media attention. These findings should be treated as preliminary for the following reasons: they have not been replicated by other researchers, the sample size was small, the sexual orientation of heterosexuals was assumed if their hospital chart did not mention homosexuality (even though six of the men died of AIDS), and the changes may have developed over an individual's lifetime from other causes. LeVay himself said the work was preliminary and that it only opened the door to other studies of brain cells and chemicals and their relationship to homosexuality. He also stressed that from his study one could not conclude that the differences in brain structure caused homosexuality or were caused by it. Similar comments can be made about other studies of brain structure by such researchers as Swaab and Hofman (1988, 1990), Allen and Gorski (1991, 1992), and Demeter et al. (1988), for example.

Technology capable of studying gene sequences made possible the publication of two papers (Hamer et al., 1993; Hu et al., 1995) investigating the genes of families of homosexuals. The homosexual men selected for the first study came from families whose pedigree indicated transmission of homosexual orientation through the maternal side of the family, that is, via the X-chromosome. It was found that thirty-three of the forty pairs of homosexual brothers shared similar gene sequences in the Xq28 region of the X-chromosome. The second study found that heterosexual brothers did not share this Xq28 sequence. Although the studies were technically of high quality, they have not been replicated. The men chosen for the studies were a highly selective sample, not randomly chosen. Thus, the studies' results can be applied only to homosexuals selected in this way, not to the general homosexual population. Most important, the fact that homosexual brothers share a gene sequence does not necessarily mean that this gene sequence causes homosexual orientation. In fact, the second Hamer article states, "... the Xq28 region was neither necessary nor sufficient for a homosexual orientation." Finally, a more recent study (not a gene analysis) by Bailey et al. (1995) found that homosexual fathers have a higher proportion of homosexual sons than heterosexual fathers do. This finding would contradict the maternal-transmission hypothesis of Hamer and Hu.

Although for a time it was thought that genetics is not involved in homosexuality, Bailey and Pillard (1991) published a paper indicating a 52 percent concordance for male homosexual orientation in identical twins, 22 percent for fraternal twins, 9.2 percent for nontwin brothers, and 11 percent for adoptive brothers. In a second study Bailey et al. (1993) reported similar values for female sexual orientation. Bailey's results were replicated by Whitam et al. in 1993. However, King and Mc Donald (1992) found concordance rates in identical twins of only 25 percent (10 percent if one excludes bisexuals). Much lower concordance rates were also reported by the Minnesota Twin Project

(1986). The particularly high rates of concordance in the Bailey studies may have been influenced by the recruitment methods used, which consisted of advertisements that may not have blinded volunteers to the purposes of the study. Subjects were self-selected rather than randomly selected.

The studies of prenatal hormone influences are generally indirect and heterogeneous. There are considerable difficulties in applying the results of studies on the offspring of female rats exposed to prenatal hormones to human homosexuality. These difficulties range from the incomparability of human and rat homosexual behavior to the very high (nonphysiologic) hormone doses used in these studies. Some cite the brain-structure studies already mentioned above to support the idea that prenatal hormones affect the development of sexual orientation. The assumption is that the structures are different from birth and that they are sensitive to hormonal influence—neither of which has been demonstrated. A third thread in prenatal-hormone-influence research is derived from accidents of nature and therapeutics. Human female fetuses exposed to too much of the male hormone testosterone (produced by adrenal tumors) look female and can reproduce, but their adult behavior is masculine. Some of these fetuses become lesbian or bisexual adults. A recent study found that children of mothers exposed inadvertently to synthetic estrogen during their pregnancy are somewhat more likely to become bisexual or lesbian. A fourth argument advanced in favor of the prenatal-hormone hypothesis is that boys who demonstrate effeminate behavior are more likely to become homosexual (Bailey et al., 1995).

The biological research since 1973 is still preliminary and fragmented. There is no generally accepted hypothesis regarding the development of homosexuality. The synod report of 1973 stated, "It is important to understand that homosexuality is not the result of any conscious choice or decision on the part of the person to be homosexual. . . ." The research done since 1973 would support that idea, but it does not provide a clear picture of how nature and nurture might interact to produce homosexuality.

## II. Psychological perspectives

Many studies have been published since 1973 that provide information regarding the gay and lesbian population. And, as often is also true of other disciplines, psychological research and theory have provided a variety of results and conclusions. There is some agreement on a general description of homosexuality as a romantic attraction and sexual desire toward a same-sexed individual that sometimes leads to sexual behavior with a person of one's own gender. It is viewed as an orientation that includes the entire range of interpersonal relations (i.e., love, understanding, friendship, belonging, and companionship) and is not just a physical attraction.

Many experts believe that dichotomies such as homosexuality and heterosexuality are too simplistic and that there are varying degrees of sexual orientation, including bisexuality. Based upon observations made in his treatment and research center, Kinsey (1948) developed a continuum of sexual orientation that consisted of a seven-point scale ranging from 0 to 6, where 0 represented exclusive heterosexuality and 6 represented exclusive homosexuality, with a range of orientations in between. Others (e.g., Masters and Johnson, 1966) have developed similar scales, which measure such factors as love, sexual attraction, fantasy activity, and self-identification. When used both

singly and in combination with each other, these scales can be helpful for understanding the multifaceted and complex nature of sexual orientation. Additionally, it is possible for a person's ratings to change over time. These ratings are not necessarily rigid. For example, same-sex fantasy during one period of a person's life would not necessarily be an accurate predictor of sexual orientation at another time in life.

Though the homosexuality prevalence figure of 10 percent appears frequently in church documents and other writings, more recent studies and surveys have revealed that the actual rate of homosexuality as a stable life orientation in our culture is more likely below 3 percent for both genders combined. The 10 percent figure has been attributed to Kinsey et al.'s 1948 study of males, where they reported that 4 percent of white males were exclusively homosexual throughout life after adolescence and that a total of 10 percent of white males were mostly or exclusively homosexual during at least a three-year period between the ages of 16 and 55. In fact, the rate of males who engage in sustained homosexual practice over a significant period of adult life is probably less than 5 percent of the male population, and the rate of men who manifest a sustained and exclusive commitment to homosexual practice is certainly less than 3 percent (Jones and Yarhouse, 1997). Female homosexuality continues to be estimated at approximately half or less than the male rates; it appears to characterize less than 2 percent of the female population. Thus, when the genders are combined, homosexuality almost certainly characterizes less than 3 percent of the population; the correct percentage may be even lower than 2 percent (Jones and Yarhouse, 1997).

The major professional societies of the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry do not define homosexuality as a mental illness or disorder. Both disciplines seem to believe that to do so would require demonstrating that homosexuals cope with life more poorly than heterosexuals do. Early studies suggested that the incidence of mental illness was indeed higher among homosexuals, but subsequent examination revealed that the early studies used poor techniques, as the people studied were selected from prisons or were psychiatric patients. In 1957, Hooker reported research that was interpreted to indicate that adult homosexual males who were not in or seeking therapy were no more neurotic than heterosexual males. In 1973, Saghir and Robins extended the work of Hooker by using a much larger sample, including gay men, lesbians, and single heterosexuals. They reported that the majority of gays and lesbians studied were well-adjusted and productive.

Masters et al. (1992) inferred from Hooker's work that homosexuals are as emotionally healthy as heterosexuals, and that has been generally held to be common knowledge, whereas the factual basis for this assertion has come under more recent question. The conclusions drawn from both the Hooker and the Saghir and Robins studies have since come under serious criticism for their methodology (Jones and Yarhouse, 1997), with specific reference to subject selection and nonrepresentativeness of the sample. That is, in both instances, the subjects were specifically selected to exclude those with possible psychopathology. Consequently, the conclusions drawn are questionable. Jones and Yarhouse (1997) concluded that contemporary research continues to suggest higher levels of distress, at least, and likely also more severe difficulties such as major depression and suicidality for the gay and lesbian population. They stated that "scientific evidence falls far short of a convincing case that homo-

sexuality in itself constitutes a psychopathological condition. The evidence also suggests that one would be on shaky ground in proclaiming that there is no evidence that homosexuality is anything more than a healthy, normal lifestyle variant." Nonetheless, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1973, no longer considering it a disorder, and the American Psychological Association took a similar stance shortly thereafter.

A variety of myths, stereotypes, and erroneous ideas have arisen about gay and lesbian individuals over the years, and psychological research has been providing additional information over time. A common misconception, for example, has been that homosexuals are more likely to engage in child molestation (pedophilia). A significant body of research in the area of child abuse, including law-enforcement research, now exists that indicates that homosexual people are *less* likely to sexually approach children (Burgess et al., 1978) and that heterosexual men are more of a threat to children (Groth and Birnbaum, 1978).

It has been commonly believed that there is a gay/lesbian stereotype as well. In fact, gays and lesbians can be found in all strata of society. They are found among all races, cultures, religions, and occupations, although not necessarily in the same proportion. Gay and lesbian people exhibit a wide range of behaviors and values, just as heterosexual people do. Another common myth is that all gay men are effeminate and all lesbians are masculine. The fact is that few are gender atypical. In a 1980 study, Voelles demonstrated that no more than 15 percent of gay men are effeminate. Similarly, Storms (1980) found that the majority of homosexuals exhibit behavior consistent with their gender.

A variety of causes for homosexuality have been suggested over the years, ranging from exclusively environmental factors (nurture) to exclusively biological ones (nature). Several studies have attempted to refute the idea of psychological causation. For example, the Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith study (1981) is often referred to as definitive evidence that the psychoanalytic hypothesis (that homosexuality derives from early childhood experience) is refuted. However, the results of that study may also be questioned because it was based on survey or interview research, which leaves it open to the influence of the phenomenon of adult reinterpretation of the past. As Jones and Yarhouse (1997) indicate, it appears that there is not enough evidence to prove the psychological hypothesis, but there is too much to dismiss it at this time.

Currently, the genetic, brain-structure, and prenatal-hormone causation hypotheses are receiving much interest (see I. Summary of biological research [above]). There is a substantive body of research in favor of those hypotheses, though the research is not conclusive. Similarly, there is a substantial body of literature in favor of hypotheses focusing on psychological and familial factors. The major emphasis in recent research appears to be on biological factors, however, even though the biological theories appear to have "no greater explanatory value" than the psychological theories they seek to displace (Byne and Parsons, 1993).

Jones and Yarhouse (1997) introduce an interesting and relevant discussion about whether the presence of causative influences, either biological or psychosocial, render human choice irrelevant to the development of sexual orientation. They postulate that there are a variety of factors that may provide

a “push” in the direction of same-sex preferences for some people, but they also state that there is no evidence that the “push” of these factors renders human choice utterly irrelevant. They agree with Byne and Parsons (1993), who say that human choice can be construed to be one of the factors influencing the development of sexual orientation but that a statement to that effect “is not meant to imply that one consciously decides one’s sexual orientation.” They suggest that sexual orientation is assumed to be shaped and reshaped by a cascade of choices made in a context of changing circumstances in one’s life and by enormous social and cultural pressures and in the context of considerable predispositions toward certain types of preferences. This language seems to suggest that choice may also be influenced by both psychological/ familial factors and biological ones (see also M.S. Van Leeuwen, *Gender and Grace*, Chapters 4 and 5, pp. 80-105).

The possibility that same-sex preferences may be different in etiology and manifestation across persons, and perhaps across genders, has not been lost to this committee. Though there is little current research literature focused on women who become lesbian later in life, some members of the committee could share clinical and pastoral experience suggesting (a) that there may be differences between men and women in etiology and manifestation of same-sex preferences; (b) that for some individuals, their past experiences did make a difference in their preferences; and (c) that in some sense they had made a choice. Jones and Yarhouse state that adult converts to lesbianism may exemplify individuals whose erotic proclivities really are their sexual preference, as Baumrind (1995) and others have argued.

Most experts today believe that the cause(s) of homosexuality have not been definitively established; there is no agreement about its etiology, and much of the data is incomplete. Science has not yet identified what determines heterosexuality, let alone homosexual orientation. Some experts express the belief that there are various causes of homosexuality, and many are leaning toward a combination of biological and environmental factors in their search for a cause.

Finally, the question of whether homosexual orientation can be changed has received considerable attention. Again, experts differ in their judgment about the possibility of sexual reorientation. It must be remembered in this consideration that many do not view homosexuality as an illness or something requiring change and, furthermore, that many gay and lesbian individuals have no desire to change.

Such professionals as Van den Aardweg (1985), Nicolosi (1991), and Masters and Johnson (1979) believe that change, though demanding and difficult, is possible and advocate that reparative therapy should be recognized as a viable option for those who are motivated to pursue it. On the other hand, there are those such as Isay (1989) who argue that efforts to change sexual orientation can be harmful, with severe emotional and social consequences. Isay believes that strong consideration must be given to how injurious unsuccessful change may be to a person’s self-esteem. Haldeman (1994) has also argued that homosexual orientation is immutable, or unchangeable, and has offered some criticism of claims made by those who advocate that change in sexual orientation is possible.

When statistics are cited that claim successful change, the question “What has changed?” must be asked. Has the person’s orientation changed, or just his

behavior? Psychologists are far from agreed on the *definition* of successful change. Some are satisfied with celibacy or heterosexual behavior (no change in orientation, change in behavior), whereas others require functioning as a heterosexual person with no homosexual inclinations (change in orientation and behavior). And the definition used has a bearing on the degree of success that can be claimed.

Given some lack of agreement about the definition of successful change, it does appear that there are some conditions that may predispose toward more rather than less success. Most spokespersons for change would agree that change is most likely when motivation is high, when gender-identity issues are not present, when actual homosexual practice has been minimal, and when there is a history of successful heterosexual functioning. These factors are revealed in change statistics cited. Successful treatment is reported for 30 to 50 percent of gay individuals who have had previous positive heterosexual experience (likely bisexual individuals), whereas successful treatment is reported for 0 to 20 percent of gay individuals seeking change who have had exclusively homosexual experiences. Though not all experts agree as to the efficacy of attempts to change sexual orientation, it is evident from the data that sexual orientation is not readily or easily changed.

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