A PLAN FOR MINISTRY TO HOMOSEXUALS AND THEIR FAMILIES



The Task Force on Ministry to Homosexuals and Their Families The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

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Preface

The topic of homosexuality is a divisive and confusing issue in our society today. Many myths and misperceptions abound on all sides of the issue. Also, as time goes on, it appears that many goals of the homosexual activist groups (or "gay community") are being realized. Laws in our country may be changed, protecting or even furthering "gay rights." Where does all of this leave the church? Increasingly, the church is put on the defensive. Sadly, some church bodies have chosen to respond to the homosexual movement by ignoring or compromising the clear condemnation of homosexual behavior found in the Word of God. A church that rejects and ignores the doctrine of Holy Scripture is not able to extend the Law and Gospel ministry that a homosexual needs.

As with many other moral issues, the church appears to hold a counter-cultural, archaic and irrelevant position. In light of all of this, the task and focus of this document must not be lost. It deals with *ministry*—ministry to *people*—people who have been bought by the precious blood of Christ shed on the cross. How the church approaches and ministers to such persons in a God-pleasing and Gospel-based way is of no little significance. Their eternal salvation is at stake. Hence, this document is offered to pastors and others who minister to homosexuals.

PART I

Definitions

One of the greatest problems in discussing the issue of homosexuality lies in the vocabulary that is used. The word itself, *homosexuality*, means different things to different people. In society at large, the word often means the condition of being sexually attracted to a person of one's own sex, that is, *homosexual orientation*. Within the church, however, it is more commonly understood to refer to the actual engagement in sexual activity with a person of the same sex, in other words, *homosexual behavior*. This variance leads to confusion. Those in the homosexual community hear the church declaring homosexuality a sin and wonder how the church can condemn them for something over which they feel they have no control, namely, the orientation. Those in the church, on the other hand, are surprised at the vehemence with which society reacts when church members believe that all they are condemning is an action.

In the interest of clear terminology, this document distinguishes between *homosexual orientation* and *homosexual behavior*² as follows: When the discussion refers to *orientation* the terms "homosexual," "homosexuality," or "homophile" are used. When *behavior*—whether it is sexual fantasy or sexual intimacy—is under discussion, the specific term "homosexual behavior" is used.

Sexuality

Human beings were created male and female. "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27). The sex of a person is determined at conception by the X or Y chromosome. It is evident as the human being develops in the womb. It is declared at birth on the basis of the sex organs of the infant. Subsequent development confirms the sex as male or female. In the created order there is no third sex. But more than that, "it is impossible to come to know the significance of our humanity without reference to the sexual differentiation between male and female. To be human simply is to exist in this male-female duality." ³

Important in this male-female duality is sexual attraction, the "sex drive." Both the Biblical teaching and the divergent views on sexual practices in America are informative for pastoral care. The awakening of the sex drive at puberty brings promises of great happiness and fulfillment. Sexual attraction is one of the strongest impulses given by God to the individual. In the healthy experience of sexuality, attraction between a man and a woman moves on to casual acquaintance, to friendship, to love, to exclusivity in the relationship, and, finally, to a commitment to lifelong faithfulness. In marriage, a man and a woman leave their families and become committed to one another. At this point the God-given and highly pleasurable gift of sexual communion bonds them in a oneflesh union and—in most cases—gives them the gift of children. This sexual intimacy bonds husband and wife in the closest relationship known outside of their individual faith relationship to Jesus Christ. In sexual intimacy, they discover a complementarity that makes them different persons than they were before.

In the development of human sexuality, the phenomenon of homosexual orientation is an anomaly, a result of the consequences of the Fall into sin that fundamentally disordered what God had created as good. Although the homosexual person is anatomically identified as male, his sexual orientation is to males, not to females. For the female homosexual, external sexual identification is female, but her sexual orientation is to females, not to males. This anomaly is profoundly upsetting to the individual and to those whose lives he or she touches.

Gender is a central component of a human being's identity. Homosexual orientation, therefore, can be a deeply unsettling personal experience that causes much confusion and anxiety. Despite energy-consuming efforts a person takes to conceal homosexual orientation, words, body language, and expressed likes and dislikes may reveal the person's homosexuality to others. Often by late childhood and certainly in adolescence, the homosexual feels that in some way he or she is different, attracted sexually to his or her own sex when peers are becoming aware of heterosexual attraction. The feeling of being "different" in turn, often leads to the feeling of being isolated from or rejected by one's peers.

In a world fallen into sin, sexual attraction is subject to strong temptation. Those who live by the pleasure principle ("if it feels good, do it") indulge in pleasurable sexual experiences. It is easy for heterosexuals and

homosexuals alike to yield to this temptation and to seek sensual pleasure by freely engaging in sexual intimacy. Moreover, many people (homosexual and heterosexual alike) hope to escape isolation or rejection by seeking bonding in sexual intimacy. But "mutual consent alone between partners does not, in the Christian understanding, make heterosexual intercourse permissible. . . . Similarly, mutual consent alone, even when joined with affection, cannot justify a homosexual union." ⁴ An example of the attempt to escape isolation or rejection is the adolescent who hopes to hold on to a relationship through consensual homosexual behavior, seeking through the same-sex intimacy to be affirmed in his or her gender.

Apart from the marital bond between one man and one woman, using sex for pleasure or to find intimacy (and thus identity) violates the divine order and places the participants under the wrath and judgment of God. Homosexual behavior comes under the strong condemnation of sin against the male-female order of creation. Homosexual behavior is a false and substitute intimacy sought at the price of enmity against God and separation from Him.

The Nature and Origin of Homosexuality

What causes homosexuality? Is it an innate condition (nature) or a learned behavior (nurture)? Is this even an important question? The following information is intended to provide background information to pastors and others engaged in ministry to homosexuals on the nature/nurture argument. The primary purpose of this document is not to explore the origins of homosexuality, a topic on which consensus or agreement does not exist. Nevertheless, something *does* need to be said about origins or causes. Trying to find the origin or cause of homosexuality is the subject of much scientific research. In addition, the determination of origin or cause is of interest to certain groups as they advance the debate in society over the tolerance and/or acceptance of homosexuality (more specifically, homosexual behavior). It is of particular interest to groups advocating "homosexual rights," since a genetic origin or cause would seem to put their struggle in the same class as the struggle for racial or ethnic equality. On the other hand, ironically, there are some "homosexual rights" groups that argue strenuously that their homosexual orientation is a choice that they are free to make. They feel

that claiming their homosexuality is merely genetic may lead to the view that it is a condition that can be treated and cured, rather than being a choice they have made.

According to some biological and genetic theories about homosexuality, a homosexual orientation is determined either (1) by the genes contributed by one or both parents, or (2) by the development or lack of development of certain centers of sexuality in the person. In either case, the result is the same. The homosexual person may say, "That's the way God made me" or "I didn't choose to be this way; it's the way I've always been." Some scientific studies have been done in an attempt to discover if the genetic or biological cause can be proven. Many, if not most, of these studies are statistically and methodologically questionable. To date, no reliable research substantiates a biological or genetic cause for homosexuality.

Another, though less common, approach to the origins of homosexuality is on the basis of development or nurture. According to these arguments, homosexuality has either a psychological or a sociological cause. In other words, homosexuality is a learned behavior resulting from either (1) a certain stimulus with a positive response, or (2) a positive model or pattern in one of a person's social groups. Again, the person may feel that he or she had no choice in the matter, that it was the only or the most positive option available, or that he or she had no influence over the external forces that affected him or her. Research in this area is even less reliable or determinative than its biological/genetic counterpart.

Ultimately, nothing scientifically definitive can be said about the origins of homosexuality. This is also true when the approach is theological. The Bible is silent on the specific, scientific cause of homosexuality. The Scriptures are clear, though, that homosexuality is the tragic result of original sin. Original sin affects body and soul—the entire person. In one way or another, we all carry the burden of Adam's sin. This problem cannot be removed in this life; it can only be absolved through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So, living in a fallen world, we have to recognize that certain thoughts, words, and deeds are sinful. Determining an exact cause or origin of them (beyond that of original sin) does not change that fact.

There are some myths concerning homosexuality that we need to be on guard against. First, not *all* men who display effeminate characteris-

tics are homosexual and not *all* women who seem masculine are homosexuals. Furthermore, one must not assume that in all cases a homosexual person has knowingly *chosen* to become homosexual (frankly, who, in his or her right mind, would choose to become something that is so widely castigated and discriminated against?). Nonetheless, we do know that homosexual behaviors take place among heterosexuals, especially in gender-segregated settings as in prisons. Furthermore, homosexual behavior, as with any other sinful behavior, is a choice a person makes. While the inclination toward homosexuality may be beyond the control of the individual, acting on this inclination is a conscious choice, a behavior that one can control. There is just as little evidence that one is born a homosexual.

Having said that, however, we do have to recognize that many young people go through adolescence experiencing sexual anxieties. Their feelings and urges change, and they have moments of sexual ambivalence. The teenager's development of a sexual identity, then, may be influenced either by others' examples or by his or her own actions. In other words, the person could engage in certain actions which, when repeated a sufficient number of times, do contribute to forming his or her orientation. Likewise, such a behavioral pattern could affect the degree of a person's sexual orientation or inclination. For a homosexual, this could mean that one person is strongly oriented toward the same sex and has no compunctions against engaging in sexual activity with a same-sex partner, while another person feels homosexually oriented but is extremely guilt-ridden if he acts out his orientation in any way.

Another myth that needs to be challenged is the claim: "Ten percent of the population is homosexual." This assertion derives from the infamous "Kinsey Reports" published in 1948. What is the problem with the ten percent figure? One is that Kinsey never claimed that "ten percent of the population is homosexual." What he asserted was that ten percent of white males engaged in homosexual behavior for at least three years between the ages of 15 and 65; and that four percent of them are exclusively homosexual after the beginning of puberty. The other problem is the research methods that Kinsey used. His study was on a group of men among whom about one-fourth had some prison experience (where sexes were strictly segregated). Most scientific studies since Kinsey estimate that the actual percentage of homosexuals among the general

population is between one percent and three percent. Obviously, it serves the cause of the "homosexual rights" movement to claim that a significantly higher percentage of the general population is homosexual than actually is the case and due to a generally sympathetic media, this myth is commonly repeated and consequently believed.

Law and Gospel Application

In the way of the *Catechism*, the Law teaches us what God wants us to do; and, when we do not do what God wants, the Law reveals our sin and God's condemnation of it. The Gospel, on the other hand, teaches what God does for us; namely, it reveals His grace and forgiveness for the sake of Christ Jesus. The *Catechism* then goes on to explain how these two Biblical teachings are to be applied: "The Law must be proclaimed to all people, but especially to impenitent sinners; the Gospel must be proclaimed to sinners who are troubled in their minds because of their sins." ⁵

Though simple words, they are challenging to apply in many pastoral-care relationships. Care must be taken to distinguish between those who are truly impenitent and those who are truly troubled by their sin (this principle cannot be emphasized enough). Those who are truly impenitent and not troubled by their homosexual behavior need to hear the Law. Often, however, these persons will be the most difficult to reach, because they will tend to be among the inactive members of a congregation. On the other hand, those who are troubled by their homosexuality and are repentant need to hear the Gospel. Their sin and sinfulness are covered by the blood of Christ.

With those who are troubled by their homosexuality, we must distinguish between self-condemnation and divine condemnation. In other words, is the person troubled because of his own displeasure with his character and/or behavior and his own failure to live up to a moral standard? Or is the person troubled because he or she recognizes that God is displeased with homosexual thoughts, words, and deeds and has threatened to punish them? Those who are troubled must realize that homosexual desires and behavior are more than a character flaw or moral weakness; they are sin.

To those who are truly troubled and repentant, there may be little need for the actual or verbal proclamation of the Law. It may be the work of the Law that drives the homosexual person to seek help from his or her pastor to begin with. In such an instance, the case should be handled in the same spirit in which Christ dealt with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11). Here Christ did not pronounce the condemnation of the Law; that "alien work" had been done by the scribes and Pharisees who brought her to Him. Instead, Jesus performs His "proper office," that is, He announces grace and comforts her: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

A caveat against preaching the Law in an *ex opera operato* fashion can be seen in this experience related by a homosexual who has felt its sting:

"The law that pastors can preach will never compare with the preaching of the law that a homosexual child gets at school and on the playground. From second grade on I was called fag, fairy, and queer. I dreaded recess because for fifteen minutes twice a day I would be left to the ridicule of the other kids without the structure and teacher's presence which protected me somewhat in class. My ninth-grade English teacher spoke in a falsetto lisp when I walked by. I went to school with a stomachache every day of my tenth-grade year because one of the kids in acting class had decided it was his special duty to make fun of me for being a sissy whenever the teacher's back was turned. Compared to this 'preaching of the law' no pastor's fireand-brimstone sermon about the dangers of hell could ever move me. Every homosexual knows very well what the Bible says about homosexuality. They have endured far more devastating applications of the law than any church can bring to bear. If they have turned to the gay lifestyle, it is not because they have hardened their hearts against God but because they have despaired of finding God's love. Frankly, I don't think most homosexuals worry about hell a whole lot. To many, as to myself, hell seems like somewhat of a relief. We would be willing to put up with eternal pain if only it meant we didn't have to pretend anymore and that we could find just one person here on earth that we could get close to and love. In fact, for many years my concept of heaven was a small, dark room where I could be alone forever and ever and not have to worry about keeping up a respectable front. Hell, to many of us, would seem like heaven if it meant that we didn't have to worry about what others thought. And to be honest, if hell is the price to pay for just a little bit of love, even perverted love, here on earth, many homosexuals are prepared to pay that price." ⁶

In seeking to apply Law and Gospel, care must be taken to keep the lines of communication open. Simply declaring to a homosexual person that "God condemns homosexuality;" will (probably) not have a positive outcome. When St. Paul began preaching in Athens (Acts 17:22-31), he did not first condemn the Athenians' violation of the First Commandment (though he did later), but he began with concerns that both he and they shared. Likewise, in dealing with a homosexual, sensitivity must be shown in when and where to proclaim the Law. The homosexual person must know that the pastor is speaking to him or her out of love and acceptance (but not approval). The key is to keep communication open so that the opportunity for Law/Gospel ministry remains open.

The Sixth Commandment

The key Christian lifestyle issue for homosexual persons is their relationship to the Sixth Commandment. Human sexuality, in its wider sense, is a beautiful gift of the Creator. Social interaction helps to establish and fine-tune sexual identity and makes friendship possible within and across gender lines. On the other hand, sexual intimacy is the means God gave His creation for the procreation of the race and for a powerful source of bonding between wife and husband.

To realize the blessings that God intends for human sexuality and sexual intimacy, God has set boundaries in the Sixth Commandment which forbid adultery, fornication, lusting, sexual fantasy, and homosexual behavior:

You shall not commit adultery.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other. ⁷

Luther's explanation shows that the intention of the Sixth Commandment goes beyond the *action* of committing adultery. Already in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus indicates how the spirit of the Law goes beyond its letter (Matt. 5:27-32). St. Paul also explains how the intent of the commandment is more comprehensive by including other sexual sins in lists that resemble the ordering of the Second Table of the Law (e.g., Col. 3:5; 1 Tim. 1:9-10; Titus 3:3). In the *Large Catechism*, Luther points to how extensive the Sixth Commandment really is:

[T]his commandment applies to every form of unchastity, however it is called. Not only is the external act forbidden, but also every kind of cause, motive, and means. Your heart, your lips, and your whole body are to be chaste and to afford no occasion, aid, or encouragement to unchastity. 8

Congregational Reaction

Many Christian people will probably react strongly against homosexuals and/or their "acceptance" in a congregation. The question is, "Why?" The answer is that any "sin" produces a negative moral judgment. But then the question becomes, "Why this sin, and not others?" That question is a good one.

The negative reaction toward homosexuals is usually called (by the homosexual community) "homophobia." The literal definition of this term is "fear of homosexuals." The questions that we must ask are these: (1) What do people really fear? (2) Is this fear theologically admissible?

To answer the first question: People usually fear what the stereotypes or myths have told them. Society has depicted homosexuals as a deviant group (although many, if not most, act so "normally" that their homosexuality is publicly undetectable). This belief often means that the "deviancy" may in some way affect them or their children. Although this scenario cannot be substantiated, the anxiety over its happening exists nevertheless. Therefore, it is called a "phobia," that is, a fear that is grounded in causes that are not reasonable.

The second question, Is this fear theologically admissible? The only allowance (see Romans 1) is that some people can convince others that rebellion against the Creator is justified. Thus, homosexuality can be "transmitted" in the sense that those who are weak in faith can be influ-

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enced to believe that homosexuality can be accepted as an alternative to the Creator's order. Only in this sense, is there Biblical evidence that fear of homosexuality is justified, but the same could be said about fear of heterosexuals who involve other heterosexuals in sins against the Sixth Commandment.

A third question, however, is this: Is this fear theologically allowable? It is not, if the church has chosen to ignore *other* sins of sexual behavior. More often than not, the church seems to condemn sins of homosexual behavior while ignoring those of heterosexual behavior. Like it or not, homosexual behavior often receives a condemnation much more severe than premarital sex or adultery. Furthermore, this unevenness in dealing with sexual sins often fosters hatred of homosexuals, some of whom may earnestly desire to live a God-pleasing life, when people in the church indulge in "verbal violence" and "gay bashing" against them. The point is, how do you deal with a person who is struggling with homosexual feelings? How do you address the individual who is questioning his or her very existence? "The real challenge in Christian ethics," as one article put it, "is not reaching the correct judgment but rather acting on those judgments in love and facing the moral ambiguities that applying those judgments will always have." 9 The fact is that "homophobia" is present in the church. The concern is that we not be like the Pharisee who said, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men" (Luke 18:11).

Pastoral Care

The pastor

The pastor must have objectivity in dealing with the homosexual. In a certain sense, administering pastoral care in this situation is not any different than how a pastor should deal with any other member of his congregation. He must remember that all people live under the brokenness of sin and are in need of Law and Gospel. He will not apply stereotypes to the homosexual. He will not be mean-spirited but have the love and concern of Christ as when He reached out to the prostitutes and tax collectors.

If the pastor has not had experience in dealing with a homosexual, or if he does not know how to proceed, he should not hesitate to seek support and counsel from others. Those others might include the circuit visitor/counselor, an older pastor, a peer confidant. Of course, this document is also intended to help the pastor in his administration of pastoral care to the homosexual.

Pastoral competence and boundaries

Not every pastor is competent to counsel the psychological or mental health problems of homosexuals seeking pastoral care. He often is not trained in this field and may have to refer his parishioner to a licensed Christian counselor. To ignore this boundary may have unexpected and unwanted consequences. First, it may do unnecessary or irreparable psychological damage to the person seeking care. Secondly, it may expose the pastor to legal liability.

A second boundary that needs to be noted is the silence of the Bible on the origin of homosexuality. Given this silence, the pastor has no warrant, for example, to declare homosexuality an orientation of choice. The pastor should realize that, due to psychological and emotional burdens many (if not most) homosexuals live under, it hardly seems to be a choice they would readily make.

The pastor's competence lies not in the behavioral sciences but in theology. He is a *Seelsorger* (caretaker of souls). His expertise is in the

spiritual realm. He is in an office that is carried out under the rubric of Word and Sacrament. In accordance with Augustana V, he gives what he has been given: the Gospel and the Sacraments. Therefore, according to his call, the pastor: (a) speaks to the contemporary religious and philosophical spirit of the age insofar as it is out of harmony with the Word of God; (b) applies Law and Gospel appropriately in individual situations; (c) nurtures faith through Word and Sacrament in the areas of worship and individual pastoral care; (d) cultivates in the Christian community living that derives and receives its power from the Gospel given in and through the proclamation of the Word, Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and the Lord's Supper.

It is important for the pastor to remember that the proper understanding and reception of the *Gospel* is the key and goal. That principle is particularly important in the application of the Law. In many instances, the first and foremost goal that a pastor attempts will be to try to change the orientation and/or behavior of the homosexual. But that application of the Law results in either that he (or she) is hardened in heart and sees no need for the Gospel; or the person, having heard the Law, despairs of forgiveness because of the "horribleness" of the sin. In the first case, there is no proper reception of the Gospel because the Law has not done its work. In the second case, the Gospel has not done its work because the person does not have the assurance of forgiveness. To ignore both of these conditions and jump to sanctification will either drive the person farther from God or result in a works-righteousness attitude.

It may be helpful, however, that the pastor has a better understanding of the spiritual needs of the homosexual. One way this might be done is for the pastor to read some of the biographical and autobiographical literature of homosexuals, both Christian and non-Christian. The stories of Christian homosexuals can be helpful because they can illuminate the spiritual journeys people take in coming out of the homosexual lifestyle. But in concentrating on the process of leaving the homosexual lifestyle behind, they often omit the earlier years of turmoil and struggle. The works of non-Christian homosexuals can help in describing those experiences, since they tend to be the same whether a person is Christian or not. The pastor is forewarned that there is much that he will be (and should be) disgusted by, but there is really not much

of an alternative to comprehending the internal conflicts and needs of the homosexual.

Pastoral care of the homosexual

According to Jesus' interpretation of the commandments (Matthew 6:21-48) and Luther's explanation of them in the *Small Catechism*, a person is accountable not just for his deeds, but for his thoughts and words as well. This applies to *all* people, not *just* the homosexual person. This clear teaching of Scripture and the Confessions is particularly relevant to the thoughts and feelings of the homosexual and to the distinction that is made between homosexual orientation and homosexual action.

In any discussion of homosexual orientation, which is the attraction of one person for another person of the same sex, it is helpful to differentiate between temptation and sin. Temptation begins with thoughts and desires. When these thoughts and desires are willingly engaged in and enjoyed rather than being rebuffed, they are soon acted on. This willing engagement and action is the willful and deliberate sin (see James 1:15), not the mere temptation itself, which can be considered involuntary and unwanted.

On the other hand, temptation often does originate in our sinful passions, that is, our own sinful flesh (the other two sources being the world and the devil). What is important in administering pastoral care to the homosexual, however, is to point out to him or her that the experience of temptation is not the same as acting on it. Dr. Luther is quite helpful in distinguishing between feeling a temptation and acting on a temptation:

To feel temptation, therefore, is quite a different thing from consenting and yielding to it. We must all feel it, though not all to the same degree; some have more frequent and severe temptations than others. Youths, for example, are tempted chiefly by the flesh; older people are tempted by the world. Others, who are concerned with spiritual matters (that is, strong Christians) are tempted by the devil. But we cannot be harmed by the mere feeling of temptation as long as it is contrary to our will and we would prefer to be rid of it. If we do not feel it, it could not be

called temptation. But to consent to it is to give it free rein and neither resist it nor pray for help against it.¹⁰ [emphasis added]

This distinction between temptation and acting on that temptation is important to make clear, because the mere feeling of homosexual temptation often leads the person to despair.

Another teaching of Scripture about temptation that needs to be remembered is that it has a purpose or benefit. In his letter, the Apostle James bids Christians to consider it real joy when they undergo various trials. The word here used for "trial" is also translated in the New Testament with the word "temptation," and is the same word used later by James in 1:12-15. What benefit can temptation have? It produces steadfastness, and the person who endures temptation is called "blessed" (James 1:3 and 1:12). In other words, temptations are "the spiritual weights with which we tone our spiritual muscles." Thus, God *allows* temptations so that we can grow stronger in our faith and lives.

With the above-mentioned points in mind, there are some important questions to ask in administering pastoral care to homosexuals. Such questions may be the following:

- 1. How do you know that the person is a homosexual? You cannot rely on second-hand information. Second-hand information is to be dealt with under the Eighth Commandment. If you have reason to believe that a person may be a homosexual, you may ask him or her, but if he or she denies it, it is best (at that point) to take his or her word for it.
- 2. Who really is this person? Recognize that he or she is a baptized child of God, and respect him or her as you would any other member of your congregation.
- 3. What is the problem? Assess the condition and spiritual status of the person: active/inactive member, celibate/practicing homosexual, celibate and troubled, practicing and untroubled, practicing and troubled. Are there psychological problems present?
- 4. What is the goal of pastoral care? The goal is to affirm the person's identity in Christ and to strengthen his or her relationship with Him.

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The love of Christ is sinless, sacrificial, giving, redemptive, selfless. This is a faith-inspiring love that replaces a search for love through sexual activity.

To many pastors and counselors who are heterosexual, it would seem that the most obvious goal of working with a homosexual parishioner or counselee would be to help that person change his or her sexual orientation. Accordingly, change is what they work for and what they pray for. Unfortunately, that strategy can often result in frustration and hurt. In some instances, a homosexual will be able to attain that goal. But not all homosexuals can reach the goal of becoming heterosexual. In fact, God may allow them to continue to face this temptation for a reason (which, it must be said, may remain hidden in God's good and gracious wisdom). Like St. Paul's "thorn in the flesh," it may be God's will that the person go on struggling against homosexual temptation, in the process learning that when he or she is weak, God is strong.

Goals for Ministry to Homosexuals and Their Families

Goal One:

To confront the individual with his/her sinfulness and call him/her to repentance.

Of all the goals discussed in this document, this one is the most Law-oriented. In working toward this goal, what was mentioned above in the section, "Law and Gospel Application," must be remembered. Care must be taken to distinguish between those who need to hear the Law and those who have already heard the Law and now need to hear the Gospel. In other words, confronting the individual with the Law may not always be necessary. In fact, it may have been the Law that compelled the person to come for help in the first place. Further application of the Law may only drive the person deeper into either despair or the hardening of his or her heart.

The pastor should remember that in the Lutheran Church, the practice of private Confession and Absolution has been the primary means of individual pastoral care. It can be salutary for the penitent to make confession of his or her sin using the Order for Individual Confession and Absolution (*Lutheran Worship*, pp. 310-311). Extending the penitent's confession of sin, the pastor may say: "Which sins do you repent of that are sins against the Sixth Commandment? the Fourth Commandment? the Tenth Commandment?" (Offer a brief content statement of each commandment and pause to hear the confession.) The rite then continues.

Full and specific confession in the presence of the confessor will reassure the penitent that the forgiveness spoken in the name and on the behalf of Christ is forgiveness for the penitent's specific sins. The penitent must have full trust in the confidentiality of personal Confession and Absolution and receive the pastor's forgiveness as the forgiveness of

Christ Himself. The pastor may wish to remind the person making confession of the teaching of the *Small Catechism* concerning the Office of the Keys and then declare, "Receive the forgiveness Christ won for you by His passion, death and resurrection. By the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I, a called and ordained servant of the Word, forgive you your sins in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." (*Lutheran Worship*, p. 311).

Thus, there is a need to distinguish between those who must hear the Law and those who already feel its burden. In many cases, the homosexual person who comes to the pastor for help probably has already heard the Law—ever since he or she began to have homosexual feelings. He or she may already know what the Bible says about homosexuality. Care must be taken so that the preaching of the Law does not push the person into despair. In other cases, however, the person will need to be confronted and called to repentance. Ordinarily, such persons will fall into one of two groups:

- 1. Active church members who are not troubled by their homosexual behavior: They justify or rationalize their behavior by ignoring or distorting what the Bible says. This is a problem of accepting the authority of Scripture. It is particularly a problem in our present age described as "postmodern," when interpretation of the Bible has been relativized, and people can interpret Scripture according to what they think it should say, or what they think it says to them. The pastor needs to deal with the with the authority issue and reiterate what the Bible says about homosexuality.
- 2. Inactive church members who are not troubled by their homosexual behavior: The question here is: Why are they inactive? The probable answer is that they do not see the church as relevant, or that they believe that the church does not care about them or even want them. Most likely, however, the real problem is that they do not want to hear what the Law says. The pastor needs to reaffirm that the church does care; that is why it is reaching out to the person. And even if the person does not want to hear what the Law says, it must be proclaimed. The homosexual will see this as a paradox: the Law condemns his behavior, but the church cares about him. This will probably be a difficult

concept to get across, since most homosexuals have grown up believing that no one cares about them. The church will have to show by its actions, not just its words, without compromising its confession, that there is genuine concern and love for the person.

Now to confronting the homosexual in preaching and teaching: Even known or suspected homosexual orientation generates strong negative feelings. As a result of today's more open homosexual presence and an aggressive "gay rights" agenda, the homosexual person encounters rejection, rejection by the family, the church, the community. He or she stands apart and alone in the world. If homosexual orientation and behavior are not differentiated in public preaching and teaching, the person with a homosexual orientation will perceive himself or herself as condemned before God without redemption.

Teens (even preteens according to some reports) present an especially sensitive case for the pastor's preaching and teaching about homosexuality. This stage of the life cycle is fraught with struggle for differentiation from the person's nuclear family and the discovery of the self. The goal of the pastor (together with the parents) is to nurture a sense of the "Christian self," sexuality being a major dimension of that self. The temptation laid before Christian teenagers by our culture is to strike out for total independence from one's family ways and values, especially with regard to the issues of faith and morality. The church faces a very real challenge in nurturing teens toward maturity in Christ.

The challenge becomes more difficult when a teenage member is struggling with homosexual feelings. Our culture, combined with the strident messages of the gay activist community, sends the message to the teenager that his or her feelings are an infallible sign of an indelible sexual orientation and that he or she will find internal peace only by openly coming to terms with his or her homosexuality and living the lifestyle. To the contrary, experience shows that coming to such a conclusion often brings despair rather than the promised internal peace, as evidenced by the tragic level of teenage suicides associated with those who have come to this conclusion regarding themselves.

Pastors need to be aware of the impact on teenagers of his application of Law and Gospel. It is true that human nature throughout the life cycle, because of original sin, fights against the Law and, therefore, also resists the Gospel. It is not surprising that these effects are seen in the

lives of teenagers in the congregation. However, we cannot ignore the fact that despair is a common feeling among teenagers, and that this despair leads to decisions that profoundly impact their temporal and eternal welfare. Dealing with teenagers requires of a pastor that he make sure, in every way, that the Gospel, specifically applied to their situation in life, has predominance (as Dr. Walther urges in *The Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel*) in his ministry to them.

With regard to homosexual feelings, the Law must be allowed to say that homosexual behavior (in thought, word, and deed) is sin. In letting the Law speak in this way, all hearers of it (especially, but not exclusively, teenage hearers) must be shown that the condemnation they feel over specific sins that they identify as their own is intended by God to show a larger problem than just this sinful deed or that sinful thought. The Law condemns our sinfulness, our sinful nature.

The specific sins over which the Law brings condemnation are but results of the true dilemma, namely, that "I am a sinner, through and through." Teenagers struggling with homosexual feelings, or even with homosexual acts, need to be shown that their real problem is *not* homosexuality (however this condition might arise) but rather is the fact that they are in bondage to sin just like everyone else. And *this* problem cannot be fixed on this side of the grave. This problem can only be dealt with by the forgiveness of sin in Christ Jesus. Thundering the Law of God, however correctly articulated, without clarifying the true situation of the sinner that the Law is given to reveal, only engenders the despair that leads either to rebellion or to hypocrisy but not to the Gospel.

Goal Two:

To assure the repentant sinner of forgiveness in Christ.

This goal assumes that the person has heard the Law and feels troubled about his or her behavior. Care needs to be exercised in encouraging repentance. Many Christians who experience homosexual temptations or feelings have been repenting since they began to have homosexual thoughts and feelings, praying that God would change them. Without the comfort and power of the Gospel, however, such repentance only pushes the person further into despair. Again, persons will ordinarily fall into one of two groups:

- 1. Active members who are troubled by their orientation or behavior: This signals that the person is looking for a resolution to his struggles. The person may feel that his sin is unforgivable, or that his lapses negate forgiveness. The pastor needs to point out that no sin is unforgivable except impenitence (see John 8:3-11; Luke 15:11-32).
- 2. Inactive members who are troubled by their orientation or behavior: Again, the question needs to be asked, why is the person inactive? He may not feel worthy. He may not feel that the church cares. He may not feel that he can be forgiven. The suggestions given above (under Goal One) may be used in this case. Be careful that the inactivity does not lead the person into acceptance and support by groups of persons who would further alienate him or her from the church.

Goal Three:

To help the individual to rely on Christ's love and strength to abstain from homosexual behavior.

God does not appoint a person—heterosexual or homosexual—to a life whose dominant theme is sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is not the centerpiece in God's design. In the divine economy, every life has a mission and purpose. Help each person to recognize the gifts he or she is divinely endowed with, and encourage him to use these gifts to build up the body of Christ, to spread the Gospel, and to serve the community.

It is especially important that *sanctification* results from the Gospel and not the Law! Only the Gospel can effect change and give the person power to live a God-pleasing life (see Romans 6). The Law produces either despair or self-righteousness.

Based on Holy Baptism, a Christian's first relationship is with *Jesus Christ*. In this relationship all are on the same standing before God and equal to one another (Gal. 3:26-28). Because of this equality that comes to Christians by way of Holy Baptism, there is no place in the church for valuing people based on sex. But this equality is not identity, and the relationship that Christians have to one another is not *gender neutral*. In the Christian life, Christ Jesus calls us to virtues that are common to male and female but are expressed in ways that are unique to one's sex.

(See, for example, the "Table of Duties" in the *Small Catechism*, particularly the words addressed to husbands and to wives.)¹²

People will vary in their ability to live out their baptismal vocation by leaving their homosexual behavior behind. There will be those who have no problem (humanly speaking) abstaining from sexual engagement, and there will be those who struggle with great difficulty. In either case, encourage the person to continue to receive strength and support in Word and Sacrament; keep communication open and frequent; and direct the person to persons or groups that can support him or her. For those who have difficulty abstaining, find out if the person is deliberately putting himself into situations where he easily succumbs to temptations to engage in homosexual behavior. If the person is not troubled by his actions, see the suggestions under Goal One above. If the person is troubled, see Goal Two above, and go over Scripture passages like Romans 7.

Goal Four:

To assure him or her of the acceptance of the church.

The homosexual person needs to understand that fears and rejection by church members are (1) based on what they believe the Bible says about homosexuality, (2) due to ignorance (see the above section "The Nature and Origin of Homosexuality," particularly the paragraphs that deal with certain myths), (3) reactions to radical or stereotypical behavior of some homosexuals, (4) not necessarily the rejection of the person.

People in the church need to see the homosexual person as someone struggling with sin—a sin, that in God's eyes, receives condemnation as any other sin. And people in the church should not set the sexual temptation of the homosexual apart, as if it were the worst of sins, from the sexual temptation experienced by Christians generally, at the onset of puberty and thereafter.

What Luther says in his explanation of the Eighth Commandment is also helpful here:

Besides our own body, our wife or husband, and our temporal property, we have one more treasure which is indispensable to us, namely, our honor and good name, for it is intolerable to live among men in public disgrace and contempt. Therefore, God will not have our neighbor deprived of his reputation, honor, and character any more than of his money and possessions; he would have every man maintain his self-respect before his wife, children, servants, and neighbors. . . . Therefore, God forbids you to speak evil about another even though, to your certain knowledge, he is guilty. ¹³

The pastor needs to have the attitude of Jesus, as in, for example, John 8. He does not disown or diminish the sin, but brings all under Christ's call to repentance and the offer of the forgiveness of sins.

The reason that it is so important to assure the homosexual of acceptance in the church is that one of the greatest realities in the lives of homosexuals is the feeling of isolation. In order to protect themselves (from being discovered) and others (from their "contamination"), homosexuals have difficulty getting close to people, even parents or siblings. To reveal their "secret" is just too dangerous, because of the likelihood that once others know, they will reject the homosexual. As a consequence, most homosexuals grow up having few, if any, close friends.

Because of this great need on the part of the homosexual, the best thing that the church has to offer is acceptance and inclusion in the body of Christ. The homosexual is already included in the body of Christ by virtue of Holy Baptism, but that reality needs to be affirmed and manifested by other members of that same body. For too long, people in the church have excluded homosexuals based on their temptation and not sin (see above). Jesus did not hesitate to associate with the "despised" of His day; while not condoning any sin, He did offer them love and acceptance, and it was that action of the Gospel that changed them and brought them to Him. The church, as His body, can and should do no less.

Goal Five:

To help the individual bear his or her burden without fear of recrimination and rejection by his or her sisters and brothers in Christ. One of the ways to help the homosexual is to respect, not reject him or her. A Christian who has had experience in working with homosexuals wrote the following about respect:

C.S. Lewis, when speaking about why prayers are not always answered like we want them to be, said that in his experience it was often the new Christian's prayers that were granted rather than those with a mature faith. He suggests that as people grow in faith they are sent to defend far more desperate posts with far less help. 14 The same could be said about some homosexuals who say they are Christian. They are often assumed to be immature Christians with a weak faith. But in reality the opposite is true. I often find that they are the strongest of all. Christians struggling with homosexuality often have been forced to fight on a lonely battlefield of Christian warfare. Often mistaken for the enemy, they are wounded by those who should be supporting them. With little help they fight the battle of temptation alone. Many are lost in the war and turn to the gay lifestyle. But somehow, by God's grace, a few make it through. And they come out with a strong faith. I never cease to be amazed at the amount of faith I find among these Christians, nor to be angry at those who treat them as mere children in the faith.

Finally, help homosexuals by utilizing (but not patronizing) them. One person put it this way:

If you want someone who is creative, is hardworking, gets along well with people, and has extra time and an abundance of love to share, then find a homosexual. Because we felt unlovable as children we learned how to work hard and be creative so that we could get positive feedback from adults. Because we were teased as children we learned how to handle people to deflect such criticism. We often have a deep knowledge of how people think and act and how to get along with others. Without families we often have lots of time and energy to give to the church. We have lots of love and caring that we want to share with others. We have felt isolated ourselves and understand those who feel the same way for whatever reason. We want that chance to

reach out to them. We have come from the depth of rejection but, having learned the overwhelming power of God's love, we want to let it flow to those around us. So give us a chance. Utilize our talents.

With Word and Sacrament, the pastor can help the homosexual to bear his cross and to realize that some people may continue to regard him with disdain, even as some people regarded our Lord. The mature members of the congregation can manifest Christian love in their midst and not tolerate biased thinking, rejection, and condemnation.

Goal Six:

To minister to homosexuals and families that include persons of homophile behavior/orientation.

The youth ambivalent about sexual identity.

Family reactions may include the following: anger (especially on the part of the father), guilt (for assumed errors in parenting or some unrelated parental sin), avoidance of the Christian community (because they are embarrassed by their "secret"), grief (over the "loss" of a son or daughter), confusion (due to a disruption of the family system), loss of respect (assumed, because they think people will says things like, "We couldn't elect the father of a homosexual to the board of elders").

The pastor will need to help the family realize that what exists is not their "fault." He will need to encourage them to be accepting of the homosexual family member while not condoning the person's sins. Some of the steps in assuring the homosexual of acceptance in the church, as explained under Goals Four and Five above, may be helpful here. Recrimination and rejection by individual church members will have to be dealt with individually, as outlined in, for example, Matthew 18.

On discovering that a son or daughter in a family of the congregation has declared his or her homosexuality, the pastor should invite the other adult family members to meet with him to speak openly about their feelings. Gentle encouragement may be necessary. The pastor should acknowledge that their feelings are a normal reaction. He should

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help them to identify one or two dominant feelings. He should ask them to recall the fear, pain, or other emotion that the son or daughter showed in disclosing his or her homosexuality.

Be aware of the family's pain and acknowledge that it will not quickly go away. Not all tension can or will be resolved. But there are some responses that will help and heal:

- 1. With each family member, total personhood is more than sexual orientation. Special gifts and endowments, precious diversity in personality, special filial love are present in sons and daughters, including the one with a homosexual orientation. Celebrate their special gifts.
- 2. Sexual orientation does *not* invalidate Holy Baptism. God's grace and the inclusion of the baptized into the family of God are fully present in the person of homosexual orientation. God does not love someone less because he or she is homosexual.
- 3. By family example and teaching, affirm your adherence to the Sixth Commandment, that is, that sexual intimacy is a treasured gift of God, reserved for marriage between a man and a woman. Sexual intimacy outside of that relationship is sin in the sight of God and this family. Taught and lived in the family, this allegiance to the Commandment positions the family to receive the person but not the behavior contrary to the will of God. This position opens the way to a winsome call to celibacy.
- 4. Do *not* break off communication. Such rejection risks breaking a relationship that may result in a son or daughter living in the streets or going to "gay activist" groups for support and community.
- 5. If disclosure of homosexual orientation triggers sin in the parent-child relationship, the family members involved need to practice the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Asking and offering forgiveness for sins against personal relationships will enhance the love and respect in which the homosexual son or daughter holds the family.

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- 6. This family's experience has been duplicated in other Christian families. The family should not seek support in homosexual activist groups but remain in close contact with the pastor and the worshipping community, and obtain one or some of the resources suggested in the "Resources" section of this document.
- 7. If it appears that the family cannot move through this experience without additional help, refer them to Christian counseling.

Resources

Books

Greg L. Bahnsen. *Homosexuality: A Biblical View*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.1978.

This book is included in the resource list because it is featured in the Concordia Publishing House catalogue. This work is not very helpful. It is very heavy on the Law with very little Gospel. Also, there is no distinction made between temptation and sin. Both of these aspects are important when dealing with homosexuality from a *Lutheran* perspective.

Michael R. Saia. Counseling the Homosexual: A Compassionate and Biblical Guide for Pastors and Counselors as well as Non-professionals. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1988.

This book is based on 15 years of witnessing to and counseling homosexuals. The author offers some of the distinguishing characteristics of female homosexuals, material not covered by many authors. Saia's treatment of the difference between homosexual orientation and action clearly spells out the difference between temptation and sin. He does, at times, lean toward a charismatic theology, especially in his chapter on fighting the "unseen enemy." He also tends to mistake sanctification rather than justification as the basis for a Christian life. The scope of ministry to the homosexual presented by the author cautions that pastoral care is a demanding and extended ministry, yet one that can be rewarding.

Mona Riley and Brad Sargent. *Unwanted Harvest?* Nashville: Broadman & Holman. 1995.

The authors combine knowledge of the roots of homosexuality with a loving approach to homosexuals themselves. They give practical suggestions for how a church can reach out to homosexuals. Riley grew up

around homosexuals; her father fought for what he considered their rights while holding to the conviction that the homosexual lifestyle is a sin. This book deals with a number of issues often overlooked by other treatments of homosexuality in a friendly and respectful way. A Lutheran reader will notice that, while the Bible is extensively used, the other means of grace are often ignored.

Studies

Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective*. St. Louis: LCMS,1981.

This pamphlet deals with all aspects of sexuality and sexual behavior. It puts sexuality and sexual expression within the context of God's creation of humankind. The section that deals with homosexuality (pages 32-36) is helpful in understanding this phenomenon within the total context of human sexual orientation and expression.

Elizabeth Moberly. *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic.* Reprint edition. Dublin, Ireland: Attic Press, 1997.

Considered one of the foundational works in the modern view of homosexuality, Moberly's book uses case studies of homosexuals to identify the root cause of homosexuality as a lack, or a perceived lack, in the child's relationship with his or her same-sex parent. This lack in the parent-child relationship causes the child to withdraw from the same-sex parent and, often, to identify more strongly with the opposite-sex parent. Yet the need to identify with and obtain affection from the same-sex parent persists. Homosexuality, in Moberly's view, is an ambivalence toward same-sex relationships. Unable to fully identify with their same-sex parent, homosexuals hold same-sex friends at arm's length while still in need of affection and affirmation from same-sex friends. And so, he or she turns to same-sex activity. Moberly believes that the "solution"—learning how to relate to the opposite sex—is ineffective. The homosexual needs, instead, to learn how to form healthy non-sexual relationships with same-sex friends.

Thomas Schmidt. *Straight and Narrow?* Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1995.

This book is an exploration of the Bible's teaching on homosexual activity. It is a response to the contention that the Bible does not condemn homosexual activities between consenting homosexually-oriented partners. This book contains strong ammunition against pro-gay theology. Schmidt is careful to distinguish between orientation and activity and between temptation and sin. This book does not—nor is it the author's purpose—give many in-depth answers or suggestions for helping a Christian facing homosexual temptation other than to lay a foundation that such a person should be shown love without compromising the moral question at issue.

Articles

(Check with your local public or academic library whether the article of your choice is available through "Document Delivery Service.")

Hadley Arkes, et al. "The Homosexual Movement, A Response by the Ramsey Colloquium" *First Things* (March 1994), pages 15-20.

The Ramsey Colloquium is a group of Jewish and Christian scholars who meet to discuss issues of religion and public life. This paper is an examination of the phenomenon of the modern homosexual movement. It looks at what the movement claims about homosexuals, the agenda(s) that the movement has, and the impact on society of a broadening acceptance of homosexual rights. The paper is a very reasoned discussion about what societal norms and public policy should be.

Bruce Foster. "Confronting Homophobia in a Confessional Church," *Lutheran Forum* (Reformation 1993), pages 54-56.

Rev. Foster examines the application of traditional Christian sexual ethics and the treatment of the sins associated with homosexuality. He demonstrates how the church frequently has become lax in the former and has remained rigid in the latter. The imbalance is accompanied by a furtherance of stereotypical attitudes about homosexuals, which in turn contribute to unjustifiable hatred toward them. This article is well

thought out, asks some important questions, and provides some possible approaches in dealing with "homophobia" in the church.

Robert Knight. "Sexual Disorientation, Faulty Research in the Homosexual Debate." *Family Research Council* 5.2 (June 1992), pages 1-8.

Knight looks at the "research" used by the homosexual movement to gain acceptance by the general public. He shows, for example, how the 10 percent figure (that 10 percent of the population is homosexual) is based on unreliable data but is accepted as fact. He illustrates how information is taken out of context and how those who question it are often intimidated. The author uses many examples to support his arguments and has an extensive list of footnotes that includes references to many sociological and medical journals.

Family and Congregation

Jerry Aterburn. *How Will I Tell My Mother?* Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1988.

This is one of the few autobiographies written by a Christian who has experienced both homosexual temptation and AIDS. It offers an excellent understanding of what is to be a homosexual and to struggle with the conflict between homosexual behavior and Biblical morality. This book is recommended reading for any pastor who wants to counsel a homosexual member. At times, Arterburn can be somewhat legalistic and light on the Gospel. On the other hand, the response of his parents' church when they learned of Aterburn's homosexuality and the chapter on forgiveness are good examples of the way Christians must learn to respond to the homosexual if they wish to help him or her.

Kate McLaughlin. *My Son, Beloved Stranger.* Oshawa, Ontario: Pacific Press, 1995.

The author discovered that her son was homosexual. This book is the account of how she and her family dealt with his homosexuality during the year in which he experimented with that lifestyle. This book is recommended for parents of homosexuals.

Daniel Puls. *A Christian Perspective on Homosexuality*. St. Louis: CPH, 1996.

This Bible study is a good tool for acquainting a congregation with what a homosexual encounters and how the congregation can minister to this person. It combines the author's personal experience of homosexuality with a Lutheran treatment of Scripture and the means of grace. The Law/Gospel message is clear; it avoids the many pop counseling techniques and suggestions found in many Christian books on this topic.

Anita Worthen and Bob Davies. *Someone I Love Is Gay*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press,1996.

This is a helpful book for parents, friends, and relatives who are just finding out about a loved one's homosexuality. Dealing with a wide range of subjects, this book cannot cover anything in any real depth. But it is an excellent book to start with. As family and friends adjust, however, they will probably need something with more depth.

"Always Our Children—A pastoral message to parents of homosexual children and suggestions for pastoral ministries" (1997), A publication of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

This 13-page tract is notable for its accurate reflection of the emotional turbulence experienced by a family on learning that one of its members is a homosexual. Five Christian responses are offered to encourage respect toward and ministry to the homosexual family member. Lutheran readers will recognize Catholic theology in the document.

Support Groups

Keys Ministries (Family Crossfires): This is a ministry to homosexuals begun by individuals within the Missouri Synod. It approaches homosexuality from a uniquely Lutheran perspective. It offers resources to pastors and churches wishing to assist homosexual members. By providing basic information, this program forces the homosexual and the pastor of the congregation working with him to deal with the Scriptures and with one another on a personal level. This program is designed for people who are just coming out of the "homosexual lifestyle." Keys

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Ministries also has what it calls a "Green Ribbon Program." This is for members who wish to indicate their openness to listening to homosexuals and helping them overcome their problem in a Christian and loving manner; they wear a "green ribbon" in public. The Keys program also offers correspondence enrollment. Address: Box 97 / Wykoff, MN 55990, telephone (507) 352-4110; fax (507) 352-7671; e-mail: keysmin@hamtel.com.

Exodus International: This is an umbrella organization that functions as a referral system for people of homosexual orientation or those affected by them. Exodus refers persons needing help to programs and counselors in the geographical area where they live. These support groups/persons differ from place to place in their approaches to helping and in their philosophy about homosexual orientation/behavior. The national umbrella organization does, however, check out the local groups that use its name. They have very strict guidelines for the groups that ask to be affiliated with them. You may write to Exodus International—North America, P.O. Box 77652, Seattle WA 98177-0652. The telephone is (206) 784-7799. The fax number is (206) 784-7872.

Ministry to Homosexuals and Their Families task force members:

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Appendix

To Develop a Plan for Ministry to Homosexuals and Their Families, Resolution 3-12A, Overtures 3-86, 3-88A-C, 3-89A-B, 3-91 (*CW*, pp. 207-08).

WHEREAS, Many voices in our society as well as in various church bodies are expressing the view today that homophile behavior is an acceptable alternative lifestyle; and

WHEREAS, The Word of God clearly condemns homosexual behavior in Lev. 18:22, Rom.1:26-27, and 1 Cor. 6:9; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in convention in 1973 stated: "That the Synod recognizes homophile behavior as intrinsically sinful"; and

Whereas, The Commission on Theology and Church Relations document on *Human Sexuality, A Theological Perspective*, states, "Whatever the causes of such a condition may be, . . . homosexual orientation is profoundly 'unnatural' without implying that such a person's sexual orientation is a matter of conscious, deliberate choice. However, this fact cannot be used by the homosexual as an excuse to justify homosexual behavior. As a sinful human being, the homosexual is accountable to God for homosexual thoughts, words, and deeds." (*Human Sexuality, A Theological Perspective*, p. 35); and

WHEREAS, The redeeming love of Christ, which rescues humanity from sin, death, and the power of Satan, is offered to all through repentance and faith in Christ, regardless of the nature of their sinfulness; and

Whereas, The need exists to make available a carefully developed Law/Gospel ministry plan to congregations and other institutions in order to minister to those who are troubled by their homosexuality; and

WHEREAS, It is necessary for the church to expose and resist the sexual idolatry of our society; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, in convention, reaffirm the position it stated in 1973, "That the Synod recognize homophile behavior as intrinsically sinful"; and be it further

Resolved, That the president of the Synod direct the appropriate boards and commissions to develop a plan for ministry usable by congregations, campus ministries, institutions, and agencies in the Synod, for the purpose of providing Biblical and Gospel-oriented ministry to persons troubled by being homophile in their sexual orientations and to their families; and be it finally

Resolved, That the goals to be pursued by such a plan for ministry be

- 1. to offer to our world Biblically alternative models of sexual celibacy outside of a committed, permanent heterosexual marriage and same-gender social, but not genitally sexual, deep friendships;
- 2. to confront the individual with his/her sinfulness, and call him/her to repentance;
- 3. to help the individual recognize that God can rescue individuals from homosexual orientation and practice;
- 4. to assure him/her of forgiveness in Christ, contingent upon sincere repentance and faith in Christ, and to assure him/her of the love and acceptance of the church;
- 5. to help the individual to rely on Christ's love and strength to abstain from homophile behavior;
- 6. to help the individual to bear his/her burden without fear of recrimination and rejection by his/her sisters and brothers in Christ;
- 7. to find ways of ministering to families that include persons of homophile orientation;
- 8. to do all this patiently, persistently, and compassionately in the love and Spirit of Christ, who says, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

[The text of this resolution can be found in *Convention Proceedings: 58th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, 1992).]

Notes

- ¹ Resolution 3-12A of the 58th Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (1992) mandated the creation of "a plan for ministry usable by congregations, campus ministries, institutions, and agencies of the Synod, for the purpose of providing Biblical and Gospel-directed ministries to persons troubled by being homophile in their orientation and their families." The office of the President responded with the creation of a working group charged with developing this plan for ministry. What follows is the result of that group's work.
- ² These terms conform to usage in *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective*. Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, as prepared by its Social Concerns Committee (September 1981).
- ³ Ibid. p 6.
- ⁴ Ibid. p. 34
- ⁵ Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), p. 10.
- ⁶ A communication from a homosexual Christian to the task force.
- ⁷ Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), p. 10.
- ⁸ The Large Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther, translated by Robert H. Fischer, in The Book of Concord, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 392.
- ⁹ Bruce Foster, "Confronting Homophobia in a Confessional Church," *Lutheran Forum* (Reformation, 1993), p. 54.
- ¹⁰ Large Catechism, "Lord's Prayer: the Sixth Petition," Tappert, p. 434f.
- ¹¹ In asking that a plan be developed for ministering to homosexuals and their families, the Synod in convention in 1992 asked that certain goals be pursued (see Appendix, Resolution 3-12A, "To Develop a Plan for Ministry to Homosexuals and Their Families"). According to the Synod's resolution, eight goals were suggested. In the part of this present document five of those goals have been addressed (goals 2 and 4 through 7). The substance of Goal 1 of the Synod's resolution (in short, "to offer Biblically alternative models of friendship") is addressed in Goals Four and Five of this document. Goal 3 of the Synod's resolution ("to help the individual recognize that God can rescue individuals from homosexual orientation and practice") is dealt with at various points in this document (see particularly, however, the preceding paragraph). Goal 8 of the synodical statement

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("to do all this patiently, persistently," etc.) is also addressed throughout this document (see particularly also the section titled "Law and Gospel Application"). Finally, one new goal is addressed in this document that was not included in the resolution of the Synod, namely, Goal Four: "To assure him or her of the acceptance of the church." It was felt that it was important to discuss also this goal, since the attitude of the church is often the most important initial factor in determining whether a person feels that he or she can approach the church for help, or a person avoids the church because he or she feels unwelcome and unwanted.

- ¹² See also Herbert C. Mueller Jr., *The Service of Women in the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House,1995), pp. 18-19. Again, an equality is conferred in Holy Baptism, but this equality does not obliterate the distinctive roles of male and female. In the one-flesh union God designed for man and woman, "the man gives and in giving receives. The woman receives and in receiving gives."
- ¹³ The Large Catechism, The Book of Concord, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 399 and 400.
- "If we were stronger, we might be less tenderly treated. If we were braver, we might be sent with far less help to defend far more desperate posts in the great battle." C.S. Lewis, "The Efficacy of Prayer," in *The World's Last Night* (Santiago: Harcourt and Brace,1987), p. 10.

s time goes on, it appears that many goals of the homosexual activist groups (or "gay community") are being realized. Laws in our country may be changed, protecting or even furthering "gay rights." Where does all of this leave the church? Increasingly, the church is put on the defensive. Sadly, some church bodies have chosen to respond to the homosexual movement by ignoring or compromising the clear condemnation of homosexual behavior found in the Word of God. A church that rejects and ignores the doctrine of Holy Scripture is not able to extend the Law and Gospel ministry that a homosexual needs.

As with many other moral issues, the church appears to hold a counter-cultural, archaic and irrelevant position. In light of all of this, the task and focus of this document must not be lost. It deals with *ministry*—ministry to *people*—people who have been bought by the precious blood of Christ shed on the cross. How the church approaches and ministers to such persons in a God-pleasing and Gospel-based way is of no little significance. Their eternal salvation is at stake. Hence, this document is offered to pastors and others who minister to homosexuals.



The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod