

The Church and Human Sexuality

Report and guidelines adopted by the
General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

A Day of Conversations

Many questions being raised in society today involve issues of human sexuality. Sometimes the Church is asked directly for its view, for example on the redefinition of marriage. More often the questions are being asked of individual Christians who are having to think through and explain their own position. At times there seems to be an assumption that the Christian view is unreasonable, with no recognition that it is seeking to protect and uphold family life.

In order to provide a “safe space” for these issues to be explored pastorally and missionally, the Moderator’s Advisory Committee have organised a “Day of Conversations”. To inform the discussion the Committee has brought together in this booklet three important papers. The first is an introduction by the Rev. Prof. Stephen Williams, Assembly Professor of Systematic Theology, outlining the Presbyterian Church’s position on homosexuality as he sees it today. This draws on the second paper, a report to the General Assembly of 1979 from the National and International Problems Committee, which the Assembly received and commended for study and comment. This is still the PCI’s basic document. The third paper, from the Board of Social Witness, recognises the need for pastoral sensitivity in relating to those who are homosexual. It was welcomed by the General Assembly of 2007 who authorised its publication as pastoral guidelines.

I am grateful to the Moderator’s Advisory Committee for taking this initiative and trust that the day will further strengthen our Church’s witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rev. Craig", with a horizontal line underneath.

**Moderator of the General Assembly
November, 2013**

Contents

The Question of Homosexuality	5
The Church and the Homosexual (1979 report)	11
Pastoral Guidelines on Homosexuality	35

The Question of Homosexuality

Introduction

What position does PCI take on the question of homosexuality? There is more than one question on the table, because homosexual activity, civil partnerships and gay marriage are three different things. Taking society as a whole, some oppose homosexual activity in any form; some do not oppose the activity, but oppose civil partnerships; some support civil partnerships, but oppose gay marriage; some support gay marriage as well. Our present remit is to set out briefly the position taken by PCI on homosexuality as such. Its moral position on civil partnerships and gay marriage follow from this, but we are not discussing here questions of social justice and legal rights in relation to these.

PCI is just as concerned about homophobic attitudes in the church as it is about its theological position on homosexuality and homosexual behaviour. In 2007, the Social Issues and Resources Panel of the Board of Social Witness reported on homophobic attitudes within PCI. It is not a mere appendix to the 1979 report on 'The Church and the Homosexual', produced by the National and International Problems Committee of PCI in 1979, which it took as its theological basis; it is of equal weight and importance. Further, PCI is just as concerned about practical questions of pastoral care as it is about substantive theological questions in relation to homosexuality. If the following summary of the position of PCI on homosexuality is read without consulting the 'Guidelines on the Pastoral Care of Homosexuals' in the 2007 report on homophobia it will, quite simply, be misunderstood and misrepresented. It has been judged helpful to provide a summary of our position on homosexuality from a theological or moral point of view, but it will turn out to be thoroughly unhelpful if the following is read as though homophobia or pastoral care were secondary issues.

The following provides us with a framework within which we approach our question.

1. PCI tries to allow its thinking on every issue to be shaped by the Scriptures of the Christian Church. This is not simply because it has traditionally turned to the Bible for guidance and certainly not because it advocates blind faith. It is because we hold that there is good reason to believe its teaching. According to the New Testament, God loved the world and reconciled it to himself through Jesus Christ. Jesus was raised from the dead and we are called to acknowledge his lordship over our lives. Christians believe that we have reason to believe this message. In seeking to understand the Bible, we are seeking to understand a book of life, not an antiquated text.
2. Central amongst the beliefs that frame Christian thought is the belief that the world is both created and fallen. When it comes to detailed theological interpretation, creation and fall can be understood in diverse ways, but they certainly undergird

the overall biblical account. What God has created is good, but all life has been marred in some way and every human being is affected. Human sexuality is just one example of this. In itself, it is a gift of God and therefore good; in the context of a fallen world, it partakes of the fallen condition. Human sexuality has no exemption.

3. Like all human behaviour, sexual activity has a proper God-given context and PCI subscribes to the belief that has marked the churches through the centuries, namely, that the Bible views marriage, understood heterosexually, as the normative context for sexual relations. This is frequently experienced (by heterosexual and homosexual persons alike) as intensely frustrating at best and an impossible imposition at worst. But it is part of the Creator's wider design for human well-being and flourishing. In the first paragraph of our report, we used the word 'opposition' in connection with homosexuality. It was necessary to do so to set the scene, but it is a word which strikes a negative note and we shall get things back to front if it is our first word about human sexuality. The Bible's concern is with the positive flourishing of human beings, whether it is in the area of sex or any other area. Boundaries within which the Christian tradition has celebrated sexual activity – marriage and marital fidelity – are meant to enhance, not to destroy, true freedom. If we do not expand on marriage here, it is not because we think that this reference is sufficient; it is because we have already set out our position in 'Getting Married in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland'.¹
4. It is sometimes said in the Christian church that we are all sexually broken people. Sexual brokenness means more than a failure to regulate sexual attitudes and behaviour in accordance with the will of God. It means that we encounter in our own sexuality something unstable or fragile, unruly or disorienting, a cause for perplexity or anxiety. This is not some morbid Christian aversion to sex. On the contrary, it is the conscious experience of a vast number of people who have no religious convictions whatsoever. We have already said that this is not the first word, so Christians underline their belief that the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy and peace can grow on the soil of human sexuality. In fact, if we do not speak of the Spirit, it is useless to speak of any subject at all in Christian perspective. Sexual brokenness and spiritual promise equally mark the people of God.
5. Although our task in this document is to describe the position of PCI on homosexuality, PCI has no distinctive position on it in relation to the Christian tradition. The position described here conforms to the position which the Christian church has maintained over the centuries. The position of PCI was set out in the 1979 report to which we allude above. What we are trying to do below is to set out its essentials and implications.²

1. See pages 4-6.

2. Although the 1979 report stated, at the outset, that it included expert views which did not necessarily reflect the opinion of the committee producing the report, this referred only to certain detailed discussions contained in the report and not to the general theological principles and conclusions advanced in it. This is also the present position of the Moderator's Advisory Committee.

The position of PCI on homosexuality

The position that has been clearly and consistently adopted in PCI is that homosexual activity is not consistent with Christian discipleship, since it does not accord with the will of God expressed in his moral law. In certain contexts of discussion, the meaning of the phrase 'homosexual activity' requires a more precise elaboration than we are giving it here, but we are taking it to refer to an explicitly sexual relationship between persons of the same sex.³ The word 'homosexuality', taken on its own, is ambiguous and may refer either to what is popularly termed 'sexual orientation' or to sexual activity. This distinction is made in the relevant PCI reports. In drawing a distinction between homosexual activity and homosexual orientation, we are aware that Scripture mentions the former but not the latter. In relation to Scripture, there has been and is much discussion over (a) the correct exegesis of the passages which refer to homosexual activity (b) broad principles of biblical interpretation that bear on how we read those passages and (c) the connection between the Bible and the contemporary world. The reason why we do not cover the exegetical, hermeneutical and theological terrain in this document is that it is simply designed as a brief statement to clarify and explain the position in PCI. It goes without saying that regular biblical and theological work must be kept up. Our conclusion is that the apostolic witness in the New Testament unambiguously regards homosexual activity as contrary to nature, understood as God's created order, and that it sets forth a permanent principle of creation, not a culturally limited perception. Because the few explicit references in the NT to homosexuality come from Paul, what he says is sometimes described as 'Pauline teaching'.⁴ This is rather misleading. At this point, Paul is entirely representative of the Jewish tradition and, from its beginning, the Christian Church recognised the unity of the Judaeo-Christian perspective on basic principles of sexual ethics.⁵

If PCI seeks to get its bearings on the question of homosexuality from Scripture and Scripture does not discuss sexual orientation, what position do we take on it? The phrase 'sexual orientation' can refer to a range of things all the way from relatively fleeting short-term attraction to unchanging disposition. Standard accounts of homosexual activity cover several possibilities such as genetic traits, social environment and personal choice. Correspondingly, these all feature in explanations of homosexual orientation. Theological judgments on the nature and constitution of sexual orientation must incorporate a range of judgments formed on the basis of the natural and social sciences. This leads to legitimate differences in interpretation amongst informed Christians on the nature, formation and causes of sexual orientation. PCI does not adopt any particular position on the presence or balance of genetic and environmental components and their relation to lifestyle choices with respect to homosexuality.

3. The questions of transsexuality and the transgendered lie outside the scope of present discussion.

4. Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10. There may also be an implicit reference in Jude 7.

5. What Paul says confirms the judgement that, although Old Testament references to homosexual activity often have as their wider context such matters as a breach of hospitality requirements or extra-Israelite cultic practices, the morality of homosexual activity as such is also in view.

The fact that PCI has no defined position on this generates at least two questions. The first question is this: if we are leaving open the question of what causes sexual orientation, we are presumably allowing the possibility of a genetic account of homosexual orientation. If we do allow that, how do we square the belief that all homosexual activity is wrong with the possibility of a genetically-based homosexuality?

In answer to this question, we first note that there is no scientific consensus on the relationship of genes to homosexual behaviour; behaviour is a complex matter and we need go no further than the field of epigenetics to establish this. In any case, scientific consensus on a question such as this is liable to break down or change. Even in principle, genetic explanations are not simple. A variety of things can come up under the heading: 'genetic factors' or 'genetic explanations', including (a) questions of genetic determination, (b) explanations in terms not of determination but of genetic predispositions which make people more or less liable to act or react under certain conditions and (c) theories about the relation of genes to environment in shaping human, including sexual, behaviour. There is no explicitly Christian position on these matters, although informed Christians may offer theological or scientific reasons (including both natural and social sciences) for coming to one conclusion or another.

While PCI is not committed to any particular explanation of orientation, it is committed to the belief that homosexual **activity** is not absolutely determined by any genetic components that may go into sexual orientation. Christian discipleship is not a matter of obeying God's law by natural human powers. It is about the grace of God given through Jesus Christ, enabling us to live in the power of God's Spirit. This is not a glib theological formula, but a belief about how God works in relation to humanity in the midst of its striving and struggling, its pain, rebellion and failure, in all of life, not only in sexual life. Yet again, we cannot underline too strongly that our task here is the limited one of summarising PCI's position. Both our thinking about homosexuality and how we handle the question in practice is obviously deeply affected by what we think accounts for homosexual orientation and this must be the subject of ongoing reflection and enquiry. However, our commitment to this reflection and enquiry is within the framework of our stated conviction about homosexual activity.

The second question is this: does PCI take the position that homosexual orientation is sinful? Because the word 'orientation' can refer to different things and there are different explanations of orientation, it is impossible to approach this question properly, let alone attempt an answer, without working through the distinctions in the meaning of 'orientation' and analyses of its causes. It is also impossible to approach it properly without bearing in mind what the document said at the outset about the reality of a fallen creation and universal disorientation. If we maintain that homosexual behaviour is contrary to the will of God, the logic of this can only be that a homosexual orientation, taken as a totality, is a sign of the fallen creation. The phrase 'taken in its totality' is meant to guard us against supposing that everything about a homosexual orientation

is a sign of the fall. Affection, love and a desire for intimacy, which we regard as gifts of creation, can go into homosexual orientation. To say that, taken in its totality, it is a sign of the fallen creation is not the same as saying: 'You sin in having a homosexual orientation'. If we discuss the word 'sinful' without making this sort of distinction, we produce massive and damaging confusion which discredits our beliefs. On the one hand, we shall be in danger of watering down the belief that homosexual activity is outwith the law of God. On the other hand, we shall be in danger of psychologically, emotionally and spiritually destroying those who have a homosexual orientation. Speaking generally, let us remember that there is much in relation to human sexuality that is unclear to us. The Christian mind unashamedly lives with uncertainty in many areas of life, convinced that truth and love are found in undivided unity in Jesus Christ, and always prepared to learn, develop, grow and be corrected.

We have indicated earlier that, despite the need to concentrate on homosexuality and homosexual behaviour in this document, PCI is as concerned to address the question of homophobia as it is the question of homosexuality. Broadly speaking, homophobia is hostility towards homosexual persons.⁶ If homosexual activity is regarded as sinful, homophobic attitudes are no less so. The 2007 report, to which we referred above, was designed to make clear that the position of PCI on homophobic attitudes is as firm and clear as it is on homosexual behaviour.

Unfortunately, in the public domain, moral opposition to homosexual activity is often described as 'homophobia'. This language seems to arise, in part, from the desire to divert an argument about moral issues into an argument about psychological attitudes. But, although we are using the word 'moral' to describe the question of homosexual behaviour, it has limitations. The question of homosexual activity certainly is a moral issue and not necessarily even a religious one, for there are non-religious people who morally oppose homosexual practice. However, the underlying question of homosexuality is also frequently a question about personal identity, not just about morality of sexual behaviour. Some moral questions can be discussed without introducing questions of personal identity. If someone questions the morality of my business practices, I am unlikely to feel that my identity is being questioned. But if, on moral grounds, someone challenges my strongly Unionist or Republican political allegiance, I am likely to feel that my identity is being threatened. In the case of homosexuality and homosexual behaviour, questions of sexual identity arise and we have to ponder the connection between sexuality and identity and the connection between a sense of sexual identity and a sense of personal identity.

The connection between sexuality and identity is surely deep and intricate. Snap judgments and easy resolutions seem completely out of place. From a theological point of view, personal identity cannot be contemplated simply by looking inwards and examining

6. It might be possible to expand this to include a negative response towards homosexuality that is disproportionate relative to other spheres of life and activity. But the 2007 report prefers a narrower reference, confining homophobia to our attitude towards persons.

ourselves as human beings, because the relationship in which humanity as a whole and each human individual in particular stands to God lies at the root of our identity. Our salvation in Jesus Christ moulds our identity at the deepest level. Nonetheless, that does not resolve the question of the relationship between sexuality, sexual identity and personal identity. It merely places the question in context. While there is nothing more basic to our identity than our relationship to God, we have to reckon with the way in which our sexuality is intimately implicated in our identity. Admittedly, to say this is not to say very much, but our formulation must remain general and vague because 'identity' is an even more complicated and variegated notion than 'orientation'.

In conclusion, we note the prominence of the question of gay marriage in contemporary public discussion. From a moral point of view, PCI's position on this (as on civil partnerships) follows from its position on homosexual activity, although gay marriage is opposed by many who do not share the position taken by PCI on homosexuality as such. The social and religious significance of the question of gay marriage can hardly be exaggerated, even though we acknowledge that this question must not be allowed to marginalize other public and social issues. Our deep conviction is that 'the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes...' (Psalm 19: 7-8). We hold that this is the case for all people without exception and experienced most profoundly through Jesus Christ. While the need to set out our position on homosexuality runs the risk of striking a negative note, emphasising what is opposed, we indicated earlier that our first word is about the goodness of God's gift and intended provision for the human race, including in relation to sex. So it is our last word as well.

Stephen N Williams
Union Theological College,
September, 2013

National and International Problems Committee

The Church and the Homosexual

General Assembly - 1979

*This report is prepared for study and should be considered as a whole.
It should be clearly understood that some sections include views
gathered from a variety of experts which do not necessarily reflect
the opinion of the committee - but which have been considered
in the preparation of the report.*

Preface

1. Homosexuality is to many people an emotionally charged subject for discussion. This is not surprising, because any aspect of human sexuality is liable to stir the emotions, both positively and negatively. Those who may be troubled, even sub-consciously, by the strength of these emotions may try to compensate either by more vehement denunciation of or by excuse for particular forms of sexual behaviour. Practising homosexuals, being a small minority in most communities, may thus be made scapegoats for the sexual fears, temptations or offences to be found in the majority; and draconian treatment of homosexuals may be taken to make up for leniency or permissiveness with the majority. Contrariwise, there will also be those who would spring defiantly to justify any minority in their views and practices.
2. A deliberate effort must be made if we are to try soberly to understand and to deal with the real human situation, rather than merely trying to rationalise our own prejudices and predilections, one way or another, whether by the use of arguments from nature or by appeal to Biblical authority. On the one hand there is a danger in Church members becoming so concerned to guard against a loss of moral standards that their Christianity becomes a matter more of law than Gospel and morality itself becomes a mask for self-righteousness or hypocrisy. On the other hand there is the danger of a kind of confused charity which can lose the sense of any real distinction between right and wrong or of the Christian calling to self-denial, not self-indulgence, for our true fulfilment.
3. Many books have been written in recent years and studies undertaken both on the nature of homosexuality and the right treatment of homosexuals. This publicity should not be taken as a measure of increased incidence in homosexuality so much as of a greater openness in discussion of the situation, including discussion in the Churches. This present limited study document would not pretend to cover all the ground or to give all the answers: instead it seeks to encourage members of the Church to go on thinking over the various aspects or considerations which we mention, rather than to imagine that everything can be settled by reaching some neat formula or simple pronouncement.
4. Among the issues here taken up is the need to be more careful in our use of words, not least in the important distinction to be drawn between homosexuality as referring to one aspect of a person's character, whether through birth or conditioning, and homosexuality as referring to active involvement in homosexual practices. A brief review of Biblical references and teaching is then followed by a discussion of homosexuality in terms of the natural order. Finally, there is a consideration of how homosexuals are dealt with by the civil law and by the Church, before offering some conclusions.

I. Introduction

5. Problems connected with homosexuality have become increasingly urgent in our society in recent years. It is therefore important that Christians should have a clear appreciation of the issues involved - theological, ethical, legal and pastoral - and should try to reach sound conclusions about them.
6. The term 'homosexual' is derived from the Greek prefix 'homos' meaning 'same' and not from the Latin 'homo' 'man'. It denotes a sexual orientation or propensity towards members of the same sex. Such a propensity need not entail a physical element and is thus distinct from homosexual behaviour. So then a homosexual is a person (male or female) who is physically attracted to others of the same sex. A heterosexual is a person who is attracted to people of the opposite sex. "Human sexual orientation is best understood in terms of affectional attraction rather than through any particular acts or patterns of sexual behaviour. Thus heterosexuality is a basic attraction to, and affectional preference for, persons of the opposite sex, while homosexuality is a basic attraction to, and affectional preference for persons of the same sex" (The Church and Homosexuality; a Report to the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1978, pp 157).
7. While heterosexuality is the normal state for the vast majority of people, it must be realised that many people, at one stage or another, have certain homosexual tendencies and a certain proportion of the population (perhaps up to 5%) are predominantly or exclusively homosexual. Just as most people who feel attracted to the opposite sex may give physical expression to their sexuality or may for one reason or another refrain from so doing, so those who are attracted to their own sex may similarly vary in their outward conduct. In addition to this, some people who by nature would be attracted to the opposite sex, may in certain circumstances become attracted to their own - for example, where they are isolated from the other sex, perhaps in prison or at sea. Others however, would seem to have an innate homosexuality which remains unaffected by circumstances. It is important to distinguish between those who have deliberately chosen to experiment with or cultivate homosexual experiences and those who are indelibly and exclusively homosexual in their tendencies.
8. Readers of this report are asked to note and remember that as far as possible terms will be used as follows:
 - 'Homosexuals' without further description, refers to all having any special orientation towards their own sex.
 - 'Practising homosexuals' refers only to those who, openly or secretly, engage in specific homosexual acts.

9. In most communities an attempt is made to establish certain generally accepted standards of sexual behaviour. Thus in Christian societies the full expression of sexual urges (genital sexual acts) has been regarded as good and proper only within monogamous marriage. But the instinct is so strong that often extramarital relationships have been widespread and even condoned. While homosexual behaviour has been regarded as acceptable in some societies, our Jewish-Christian tradition has been strongly opposed to it and indeed has often regarded it with a peculiar horror.
10. The fear and revulsion with which many people have regarded homosexual practices have sometimes produced a conspiracy of silence, which in turn has led to widespread ignorance and prejudice, so that homosexuals have sometimes been regarded as objects of blame or contempt simply because of their condition, irrespective of whether or not they engage in homosexual practices. Ill-informed heterosexuals have looked on them as deliberate perverts, to be held responsible for their tendencies. In many cases homosexuals have suffered great loneliness and unhappiness through the various pressures of society. Frequently they have tried with varying degrees of success to conceal their condition and this has in some cases added to their distress. On the other hand there are those who have been able to accept the fact that they are different from the majority and have lived happy integrated lives despite the fact that their condition has not been fully understood by a predominantly heterosexual society.
11. Among the factors making the study of homosexuality a pressing one at the present time are the following:
 - (i) The widespread questioning of formerly accepted moral standards, particularly in the realm of sexuality.
 - (ii) The growth of a fuller and deeper understanding of human sexuality generally, including the extent and depth of homosexuality in every society, and also a greater awareness of the suffering of many homosexuals as a frequently despised minority.
 - (iii) The actual or proposed changes in the law relating to homosexual practices and the controversy about the effects of such changes on moral standards and behaviour. (This has, of course, become particularly relevant in Northern Ireland recently).
 - (iv) The self-conscious and open stance of a number of homosexuals who under the general title of "The Gay Movement" have called for a totally changed attitude on the part of the general public towards homosexuality, for the abolition of all penalties for homosexual acts among consenting adults, for the recognition of homosexual marriage, and so on.
 - (v) The increasing awareness in the Christian Church that there is a great need for a fuller understanding of the pastoral care of homosexuals, and for a pastoral ministry to homosexuals who are outside Church life.
 - (vi) Recent studies, Biblical and psychological, which are directly or indirectly relevant to homosexuality.

12. In view of these factors it is incumbent on Christians to avoid any facile judgements based on propaganda, popular opinion, fear or prejudice; and instead to weigh their judgements carefully under the guidance of the Spirit, so that we may bear witness to the truth as we see it, always trying to speak that truth in love.

II. Biblical Teaching

13. Any presentation of the teaching of the Bible about homosexuality requires to be made in its appropriate setting ie a study, however briefly, of sexuality in the Bible. When Jesus was questioned on the morality of divorce, He insisted that it was not sufficient to quote from the Law, but that it must be seen against the background of God's original purpose for mankind in creating them male and female.

Genesis on Sexuality

14. It is therefore most appropriate to begin a study of sexuality in the creation records of Genesis. In the first chapter it is stated that God created mankind 'in His own image', and that He created them male and female (v.27). He gave them His blessing and told them to be fruitful and multiply (v.28), and in an overall review of His creation saw that it was all 'very good'.
15. The record in the second chapter of Genesis describes in figurative language the formation of the woman from the man's rib (21-23); this is the author's way of showing the male's incompleteness until he is joined and completed by the female. Clearly God's ideal purpose covers not only the human being's relationship to Himself but also sexual differentiation, and the relationship between the sexes including the objective of procreation.
16. Male and female are complementary partners and, as they 'know' each other in all the depth of the Hebrew word 'yada', they express humanity in all its personal enrichment. What is being emphasised is the 'need of human beings, in this case the man and the woman, to relate to each other, to care for each other and to know each other intimately as husband and wife. It needs to be stressed that the Bible does not claim that the man/woman relationship is the only or the best example of a loving relationship. If we obey Jesus' command to love God and our neighbour, then we must enter into close caring relationships with other human beings irrespective of sex.
17. It is true that sexual relationship, like other relationships, was adversely affected by the advent of human sin. After the story of the Fall, the hint of stress and even conflict between man and woman appears in the words of God to the woman 'He shall rule over you', Gen. 3.16. This is borne out by many of the Biblical stories and references, which illustrate the multitude of ways in which God's gift of sex has been warped and disfigured. But the original purpose of sexuality was to bring unity to the man and woman and make them 'one flesh' (Gen. 2.24). It is significant that Jesus in His teaching goes back before the disturbed relationship due to the Fall, to

what God originally intended. By His words and attitudes, Jesus asserts the equality of men and women before God and it is undoubtedly His aim, as also of the Genesis record, to show that God intended that man and woman should complement each other.

18. Man is by nature heterosexual, and true sexuality can only be fulfilled as intended by God, within the relationship of love between man and woman. Human sin cannot alter God's purpose. Heterosexual relationships are still the only 'natural' sexual relations (cf Rom. 1:27-29). God, the Bible testifies, deals with the effects of sin, not by accepting lower standards, but by redeeming men from sin through Jesus Christ, and restoring in them by the inworking of His Spirit the image which sin had destroyed (1 Cor. 6:11).

Biblical Teaching on Homosexuality

19. We now consider what Scripture has to say directly on the subject of homosexuality. There appears to be only four direct references in the Old Testament.
 - (i) Leviticus 18:22 - includes among a number of prohibitions "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind, it is abomination".
 - (ii) Leviticus 20:13 – prescribes "If a man also lie with mankind as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them".
 - (iii) Genesis 19:1-9 - tells of the attack by men of Sodom on the house of Lot where angel visitors were spending the night. They demanded that Lot should bring out his guests "that we may know them". The Hebrew word 'yada' (meaning 'to know') is sometimes used in a sexual sense (ie to have intercourse with). Traditionally the sin of Sodom has been associated with homosexuality, although some scholars treat the attack as a sin against the sacred laws of hospitality. It is scarcely necessary to mention the condemnation of such attitudes and intentions voiced by Lot, "do not so wickedly", and implied by the record. The incident is obviously meant as an illustration of the earlier statement, "The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly" and God's words to Abraham, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great ... their sin is very grievous" (Gen. 18:20). More than twenty Scriptural references to the fate which the cities of the plain suffered for their sins, find an apt summary in Jude v7, "Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication and going after strange flesh (Greek - 'other flesh') are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire".
 - (iv) Judges 19:22-30 - relates the parallel story of the sons of Belial in Gibeah making a similar demand to an old man who had given shelter to a Levite and his concubine.

Summary - Old Testament

20. The moral condemnation pronounced thus on homosexual actions would seem to be inescapable, unless one is prepared to include virtually all the moral imperatives of the Jewish Law with the ceremonial injunctions which the Christian Gospel has superseded, or to argue that by rejecting the death penalty prescribed for such actions we are also rejecting the moral judgement. Before accepting any such argument one would need to prove that the Christian Church of the New Testament accepted a revised standard on homosexual conduct. At any rate it is surely incontestable that Old Testament references to homosexual practices strongly condemn them as a sin against God and a degradation of society.
21. It may also be mentioned that there are references in the Old Testament to 'quadeshim'. These seem to have been male cult prostitutes. On five occasions the word was translated in the AV by 'sodomite'. The RSV has 'male cult prostitute'. The NE Bible has 'male prostitute' (Deut. 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 21:46; 2 Kings 23:7).
22. In the New Testament, there are three clear references which are all in the Pauline Epistles:
- (i) Romans 1. 24-32 - Paul catalogues a formidable list of sins into which unregenerate men fall when they refuse the light of God; and such men are 'given up' by Him to 'uncleanness and vile affections'. The symptoms of the degeneracy which Paul chiefly elaborates is homosexual vice (Greek arsenokoites); "the men leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working that which is unseemly and receiving in themselves that recompense for their error which was meet". Twice Paul refers to heterosexual relations as being 'natural', but evil men and women 'changing' or 'leaving the natural use' into 'that which is against nature'. He would leave little room for the contention by many homosexuals that their orientation is as 'natural' and God-given as that of heterosexuals, therefore it may and should be physically fulfilled within God's will and purpose. It is also noteworthy that the final verse condemns not only participation in the sins just catalogued, but the approving (AV having pleasure in) those who practise them.
 - (ii) 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - Paul declares that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. Becoming more specific, he says, "Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate (Gk 'malakos' - soft) nor abusers of themselves with mankind (Gk 'arsenokoites') nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God".

- (iii) Timothy 1:9-11- Gives a list of those who are ungodly, sinners, unholy and profane, patricides, matricides, murderers, whoremongers, “them that defile themselves with mankind”, kidnappers (literally ‘menstealers’), liars, perjurers and “any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust”.

Summary - New Testament

23. It is evident that, in the New Testament, the Old Testament view that homosexual acts are sinful in the sight of God is fully endorsed and reinforced. In the light of these passages it would be difficult to argue that a practising homosexual may engage in and claim God’s blessing on a homosexual relationship.
24. At the same time Paul emphasises, in the 1 Corinthians passage, that there were members of the Church there who had such a sinful past but who had found cleansing, renewal and acceptance in the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Similarly in 1 Timothy; the preceding verses 5 to 8 emphasise that the real aim of Christian doctrine was ‘charity’ or love, coming from a pure heart, a good conscience and unfeigned faith. However there were those who turned aside from this “desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm”.
25. This too is a warning to be heeded by those who turn Christianity into a new kind of legalism, preoccupied with judging rather than saving men, with punishing rather than restoring them. “The law is good, if a man use it lawfully”, as a guide or means to lead sinners to Christ, but not as if it were God’s last word for man. Christ did not come simply to help us to keep the law: this was Paul’s constant argument with the Judaising disciples of his day.

III. Homosexuality and Human Sexuality

Introductory

26. It is only in recent years that the Church has made any real effort to understand the phenomenon of homosexuality. There can be little doubt that many self-confessed homosexuals would welcome dialogue with the Church, through which they could express and explain their point of view; and there are signs, much to be welcomed, that more and more members of the Church are prepared to seek enlightenment and to show compassion rather than judge in ignorance and indulge in invective.
27. Many homosexuals who are, today more than at any time before, seeking to clarify and justify their position, have declared themselves in sympathy with the discussion of their problem by those who are prepared to take trouble to understand it. There can be no doubt about the sincerity and ability with which this is done; and a real effort must be made to try and understand, though not necessarily to agree with, what these people have to say about their condition and the place that they should have within society.

Homosexuality: Its Definition

28. One of the main difficulties underlying any discussion of the problem of homosexuality is that of definition. A search of the literature on it readily reveals a wide spectrum of opinion on what is, and what is not, to be regarded as truly homosexual behaviour.
29. It has been held that the homosexual is one who engages, in adult life, in overt sexual relations with a member or members of one's own sex. Such a view fails, however, to make a distinction between those who indulge in homosexual behaviour out of an intense sexual attraction to members of the same sex and those who engage in such behaviour for other reasons. It is well known, for example, that indulgence in homosexual activities can be a consequence of lengthy heterosexual deprivation, as among sailors and prisoners, or it may be merely a reflection of the weakness of the individual's self-control. In the absence of such self-control an individual may allow himself to be used, for financial gain say, by another for homosexual ends, but would not regard himself as a homosexual and does not experience any genuine erotic feelings for his partner.
30. A more satisfactory definition, in our view, is that which states that homosexuality is a psychosexual phenomenon, wherein is to be seen the same kind of strong and spontaneous capacity to be aroused by a member of one's own sex, as heterosexuality implies in regard to members of the opposite sex. A homosexual then is one who

is motivated, in adult life, by a definite preferential erotic attraction to members of the same sex, and who may, but need not necessarily, engage in overt sexual relations with them.

31. This definition would, therefore, exclude patterns of homosexual behaviour that are not motivated by specific preferential desire, e.g. those shown by some sailors and prisoners in certain situations. Most members of such groups who, because of circumstance, engage in transitory homosexual patterns of behaviour as a consequence of heterosexual frustration, and who turn, or return, to exclusive heterosexuality as soon as the opportunity presents itself, are not basically homosexual; and it only creates confusion to place them in that category. The definition also excludes the transitory, opportunistic homosexual patterns of behaviour of some delinquents, who for gain and not because of their having homoerotic feelings, are prepared to allow their bodies to be used by others.
32. All such patterns of behaviour which are transitory, or dictated by situational pressures, should not be confused with those that grow out of basic personality needs and are preferentially sought even where alternatives are present. Only the latter represent genuine homosexuality.

Homosexuality: Male and Female

33. There is abundant evidence to show that homosexuality has existed at all times and in all cultures. It is far from easy, however, to ascertain accurately its incidence in any population. This is partly because homosexuals have, until very recently, been a submerged group within society. Many experts believe that one in twenty of the population can be regarded as basically homosexual.
34. Homosexuality between women is known as lesbianism. It has always been tolerated with greater liberality than homosexuality between men, about which more has been written than about homosexuality between women. Various suggestions have been made as to why male homosexual practices should be regarded as a greater sin than lesbian practices. One is that this more tolerant attitude towards lesbians is a direct carry-over from rabbinical law, which regards male homosexuality as a serious crime but female homosexuality only as a disqualification for marriage with a rabbi. Our present laws against male homosexual practices, it has been claimed, still reflect the ancient view, evidently not yet outgrown by our modern community and its legislators, that women, like children, are inferior beings; and so grown men need not have much interest in what they do among themselves.
35. Many authorities are agreed that the prevalence of homosexuality among males is greater than among females. The majority view would seem to be that the question of homosexuality is much more ambiguous and changeable in women than men.

However, even when allowance is made for the differences in the psychosexual development of men and women, the essential factors causing homosexuality are in several important respects similar in both sexes. One of the most striking differences that some writers claim to have found between males and females was in the stability of the homosexual relationships that the latter had built up with their partners. Whereas it was found that many female patients had stable homosexual relationships, very few of paired males could say the same of theirs. It would seem as if the women generally were much less dissatisfied with their homosexual lives than were the men. The suggestion has been made that the female relationships were more of the mother/daughter type, in which actual or symbolic sexual gratification assumed far less importance than in the male pairs. But here, as elsewhere in dealing with our subject, there would seem to be the need for further research.

Homosexuality: Its Causes

36. In spite of the increasingly abundant literature dealing with homosexuality, there is still little sure and certain knowledge of its causes. Many explanations for the origins of specific cases of homosexuality can be found, but as yet no single group of factors can be definitely regarded as explaining all homosexual behaviour. One authority, indeed, has listed some seventy causal factors for the condition, and has gone on to indicate his support for the now widely-held view that the mysteries and complexities surrounding the sources of homosexual orientation have yet to be unravelled.
37. Such theories of the causation of homosexuality as are to be found in the contemporary literature dealing with the subject may be regarded, generally speaking, as falling under the following heads:
- (i) **Genetic theories.** According to these, homosexuality is predominantly a matter of heredity. However, it is claimed that studies of chromosomes and genes are still insufficiently advanced to enable us to determine with any certainty whether or not the latter can be regarded as providing an ultimate biological explanation for homosexual orientation. It seems to be generally accepted that, while sexual capacities, like all other physiological capacities, are genetically determined, it is most unlikely that genes control sex orientation in the sense of individuals being predestined to become homosexual or heterosexual. It is not denied that biological factors play a part in the emergence of homosexuality, but it is urged that no real evidence has yet been produced to show that homosexual tendencies occurring in families over successive generations cannot be explained as the result of living in similar or identical environments, not as the result of genetic inheritance. There is some statistical evidence to suggest that male homosexuals are born of older parents, and that it is therefore possible that some genetic abnormality is involved. It has, however, been thought more plausible to assume, in the light of all the

known facts, that older mothers are apt to be more deeply involved emotionally with children born late in their lives and so rear them differently from other children.

- (ii) **Hormonal theories.** It would seem that while hormones have a very important role to play in the development of the secondary sexual characteristics of the body, they have a much less significant part to play in the sexual behaviour of adult life. Some researchers, regarding sex hormones as the primary determinants of masculinity or femininity, have treated homosexuals with hormones only to find in many instances that while sexual excitement has been thereby increased there has been no marked change in their orientation. Although some hold that these theories are still inconclusive, others take the more definite view that hormones have no connection with the sexual orientation of human beings.
 - (iii) **Conditioning theories.** It is sometimes claimed that homosexual orientation is not so much caused by physiological factors as by the psychological factors of learning and conditioning. Homosexual orientation is accordingly to be understood as caused by early or persistent positive conditioning to members of the same sex, and not, as some other authorities would have it, by hidden but incapacitating fears of the opposite sex. Support for theories of this nature is to be found in the fact that some previously heterosexual men who had engaged in homosexual practices during long periods in prison found it difficult to resume heterosexual practices when released.
 - (iv) **Psychoanalytic theories.** These are, of course, associated with the name of Sigmund Freud, who held that the most powerful and most pervasive of human drives were sexual. He contends that in all human beings there is a trend towards homosexuality, which stems from their constitutionally-rooted bisexuality. In the process of achieving heterosexuality, all human beings go through an inevitable 'homoerotic' phase. Certain kinds of life-experience could, however, arrest the development towards heterosexuality and the individual would then remain 'fixated' at the homosexual level. But even when the development did proceed normally, Freud believed that certain traces of homosexuality would still remain as permanent aspects of the personality and that these 'latent' homosexual tendencies could be seen in 'sublimated' expressions of friendship for members of one's own sex and in patterns of behaviour more appropriate to the opposite sex.
38. Several psychoanalysts, however, have questioned the validity of Freud's view that homosexuality is a normal phase of human development, on the ground that the emergence of homosexuality is rather largely due to environmental circumstances, more particularly to the way one has been regarded and treated by others during early childhood. Others have faulted Freud's view of homosexuality on the ground that, in their view, it is not linked in any way to overt sexual behaviour as such but is related to a whole system or complex of feelings and reactions that exist in varying degrees in all human beings, though most evidently in those whose behaviour is homosexual. It is held that in terms of Freud's theory it is well-nigh impossible to determine at what point a person becomes a homosexual, since homosexual patterns, according to him, are present in the unconscious of all people.

39. We feel driven to the conclusion that homosexuality is a many-sided phenomenon and that all the causal factors are mutually dependent. The evidence would, on balance, suggest that we are neither homosexual nor heterosexual by biological determination alone, but are also affected by our social and cultural environment. While none of the theories we have considered is held to be void of all truth, there seems to be emerging a consensus of qualified opinion that most cases of homosexuality are the result of post-natal and psychological causes. But whatever the causative factors at work, whatever the amalgam of heredity and environment, nature and nurture, responsible for the development of a homosexual orientation, all our authorities are agreed that most homosexuals do not choose their orientation any more than heterosexuals do theirs.
40. It is perhaps not irrelevant to mention here that there is considerable evidence to support the view that homosexuality has not shown any measurable increase as a result of urbanization and technological progress. The impression of an increase, it has been pointed out, is gained simply because this subject, like others of a similar nature, has been, until fairly recently, regarded as unmentionable but is now increasingly widely and openly discussed.

Homosexuality: Is it a Sickness?

41. The difficulties surrounding the issue of homosexuality are exemplified by still another fundamental question: Are we to regard homosexuality as an illness, or as simply a different way of life?
42. Some writers on the subject take the line that it is definitely an illness to be treated or cured. It is in their view 'pathological', 'a neurotic distortion of the whole personality', and 'incompatible with a reasonably happy life' - to mention but some of the expressions that have been used to designate it. Other writers, however, would argue that, apart from the specific differences in sexual orientation, no evidence has resulted from psychological testing that would suggest the existence of any 'pathology' that would differentiate homosexuals in any way from a group of normal heterosexual people; and they would at the same time draw attention to existing evidence that strongly suggests that a homosexual couple may have a relationship that is as happy and fulfilling as that enjoyed by heterosexual couples.
43. It may be, as has been pointed out, that psychoanalysts form their concepts on the basis of those homosexuals who go to them for treatment. There is case material that strongly supports the view that there are many homosexuals who believe themselves to be emotionally and inter-personally well adjusted and have felt no need to seek psychological help. This would suggest that what many regard as sexual deviance need not necessarily mean social maladjustment. After all, if

psychoanalysts were to base their judgments about heterosexuals on those of them who went for treatment, how wide of the mark would be their findings regarding heterosexuals as a whole!

44. It might be argued that it is the task and duty of the psychoanalyst to help homosexuals to achieve a heterosexual adaptation where possible, so that they may have a more harmonious relationship with their social environment. So long as we live in a society that regards homosexual behaviour as reprehensible, there would seem to be justification for seeking to prevent children and adolescents from developing homosexual patterns of behaviour.
45. So far as we are aware, no evidence has been produced to suggest that homosexuals are less to be trusted with young people of the same sex than are heterosexuals with young people of the opposite sex. Such factual evidence as we do have strongly indicates that homosexuals are no more or no less than heterosexuals characterised by sexual appetites, weakness of character, instability of personality and untrustworthiness.
46. We are not suggesting that such reasoning justifies homosexuality; but we are suggesting that it enables us to keep in perspective the harm that is alleged to be done to society by homosexuals. Indeed, there are those who would argue that many of the problems that make homosexuals seek psychoanalytic help are not those belonging intrinsically to their homosexuality, but those arising from their interactions with a hostile society, which both penalises them for their behavioural patterns and calls in question their identity as ordinary citizens.

IV. Homosexual Practices and the Law

47. The law of the land has long regarded certain homosexual practices, specifically sodomy, as offences; and it has prescribed heavy penalties. As the law now stands in Northern Ireland and Scotland, the maximum penalty for sodomy is penal servitude for life. This and other penalties were laid down in the Offences Against the Person Act, 1861.
48. Following the publication of the Wolfenden Report in 1957, the law of England and Wales was changed by the Sexual Offences Act 1967, which laid down that a “homosexual act in private shall not be an offence provided that the parties consent thereto and have attained the age of twenty-one”. Definitions are also included which would make it an offence where more than two persons are present when the act is committed, or in a place where the public have access. The maximum penalty is ten years. No proceedings can be instituted against any man under twenty-one for the offence of sodomy or gross indecency, except with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions.
49. In Scotland it has been the practice not to prosecute male homosexuals in cases where, under the 1967 Act, no offence would have been committed in England and Wales.
50. In the Irish Republic, the law is the same as in Northern Ireland at present, and in England and Wales before the passing of the 1967 Act.
51. Since the beginning of 1972, there were eleven convictions for homosexual offences in Northern Ireland. All but one of these would have constituted offences under existing law in England. Complaints about homosexual acts in private between consenting adults were rarely made to the authorities and there was no evidence of any increase in the number of complaints in recent years.
52. In July, 1976, Mr. Merlyn Rees, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, requested the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights to consider the desirability of amending the law on homosexuality (as well as the law on divorce) with a view to bringing the law in Northern Ireland more closely into line with the current law in England and Wales. The Commission presented its report on April 18th, 1977 and recommended that the law should be brought into line with the 1967 Act, but did not recommend that future amendments to that Act in Great Britain should automatically apply to Northern Ireland. In July 1978, the Northern Ireland Office issued a Draft Order which proposed broadly that the law in Northern Ireland should be brought into line with that in England and Wales.

53. It will then be seen that the law and society in general take a strong view on the undesirability of certain homosexual practices as opposed to other sexual sins or irregularities. The one major difficulty arises from the confusion between law and morality. Legal systems have been influenced to a considerable extent by the teachings of the Churches, so that the latter have tended to be concerned with the fostering of morality by regulation and law. While the State may make and enforce laws to encourage what is moral and good, its main function should be to protect people, particularly those who are young or those who are not in a position to protect themselves, from being injured by others. In the field of family law and sexual practices, the State can, through, appropriate measures, provide for the encouragement of marriage and of family responsibility.
54. Among the category of sins and offences condemned by Old Testament law in Leviticus chapters 18 and 20 are sodomy and adultery, which were capital offences under the Levitical Law. These sins are also included in the category of sins listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (which incidentally also includes theft, drunkenness and extortion). However, adultery is not an offence against the civil law today, although it may involve other legal processes.
55. Another problem regarding homosexual practice between two people who are thus inclined is the difficulty of enforcing the law; and cases of this kind not infrequently reach the court because of blackmail or threats of some kind. It is clear that practising homosexuals have traditionally been liable to harassment and persecution. While some of these may be due to official action, much of it has been caused by social pressure and by ignorance and prejudice. Homosexuals should be protected from persecution whether in public or private, while always being answerable like any other citizens for breaches of the law.

V. The Church's Pastoral Care and Understanding of the Homosexual

A. Repentance and Self-examination the Starting Point

56. Effective pastoral care needs to begin with self-examination. We cannot understand and relate as we should to others if we are not prepared to seek to know ourselves and our emotional drives and reactions. Otherwise we fall under the influence of our own prejudices. This is particularly true of the emotive area of sex in all its varied forms and relationships. The Church has been reluctant to study this area of human life and slow to engage in frank education in sex and family relations even for those about to be married. It is not surprising, then, that the Church has been even more reluctant to seek to understand homosexuality and the problems of the homosexual. Consequently those with a homosexual condition have almost universally been treated with unthinking prejudice rather than met with informed pastoral concern.
57. People in any way out of the ordinary suffer most from misunderstanding. For the majority of people, both inside and outside Churches, homosexuals are regarded as a negligible minority, having what is thought to be an unnatural and quite incomprehensible propensity. Rational, cool and balanced discussion of such a condition and its attendant patterns of behaviour is still for many well-nigh impossible. The Americans have coined the term 'homophobia' for the state of mind of the majority of people in whom is found a mingling of contempt, hatred and fear of homosexuals. Such people become the victims of social or psychological fears - prejudice, discrimination and oppression being practised against any who are found to be homosexuals. Unexamined assumptions, that all homosexuals indulge in homosexual practices and are likely to pervert others, feed our prejudices and blind us to the real facts.
58. It is right that we confess how, whether unwittingly or as a means of protecting ourselves from serious re-thinking, we have caused grave hurt to people who cannot help their condition as homosexuals. Many of them have been driven by our lack of love and understanding to withdraw into a frightened seclusion, unable to identify with heterosexuals yet finding themselves under social pressure even to avoid others who share their own sexual orientation. At the same time we have to take some of the blame for other homosexuals going to the extreme of propagating or flaunting their 'gay liberation' and making a virtue of self-acknowledged homosexual behaviour. We have to ask whether; our rigid attitudes, our neglect of this deep-rooted and significant personal and social problem, and our unwillingness to face up to all the relevant factors, have contributed to these expressions.

59. Those of us who have not personally known this condition must be careful about condemning it, as we must be before condemning ways of life about which we could know so little from first hand experience. We must listen with special attention, not only to those expert in the study of homosexuality, but also to those, some of whom share our faith in Jesus Christ, who are themselves of the homosexual condition. We acknowledge our debt to what has been learned by way of understanding of the homosexual condition. The pastoral relations of our Church members and ministers with those who are homosexual will be greatly improved if we can share what we have learned in this regard.

B. Pastoral Care Must Proceed on a Broad Front

60. It is at the heart of pastoral care to provide fellowship in the Holy Spirit through worship and in organisation for one purpose or another around the Church, in which people may grow to maturity in Jesus Christ. Reconciliation between God and persons, and persons with one another, and adjustments to life's demands, depend on grace, mercy, justice and truth in which all, regardless of condition, can share to the full with all liberty. Guilt-ridden, lonely people turn to the Church for help; and we must ask ourselves what we, and our own congregations, may have done as regards membership - with all the discipline that goes with that - on the part of those whose sexual orientation is towards those of their own sex.

61. Pastoral care flows from a sense that as we, who are all sinners in thought, word and deed, are accepted by God in Jesus Christ within His Church, so we can and must accept others, also sinners, who may seek and find the same grace wherein we stand. The grace is not ours to confer. We may help to introduce others in their need to the source from which we have benefited,

‘Just as I am - Thy love unknown Has broken every barrier down’
may be sung sincerely and in faith by everyone who responds to the gracious invitation:

“Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying your heavy loads and I will give you rest” (Matt, 11:28). We may by God's grace and wisdom, “become all things to all men that we may save some of them by whatever means are possible” (1 Cor. 9:22).

62. It is likely that most pastoral work falls to the minister and to the elders; but it is the shared responsibility of all members to exercise their pastoral care in the fullest sense. We must therefore stress that the attitude, the grace, the befriending spirit of the whole congregation is the setting in which people find grace and support in Jesus Christ. The correcting of wrong attitudes and the sharing of information - ethical, doctrinal and personal - through preaching and teaching in the Church, is a necessary component of healthy Church life as far as pastoral work is concerned, not

least as regards the homosexual section of Church and community, if the Church is to become a caring fellowship in which homosexuals might be able to acknowledge their condition without being misunderstood.

63. The development and pursuance of true pastoral care by the whole Church must be set in the context of continuing study of the Word of God and the circumstances of the people, coupled with prayer and honest, loving, patient, open dealing with people in their contemporary circumstances. We must ask ourselves whether we are ready to embark on such an enterprise. If not, we have given up the right to be the Church of Jesus Christ. If we are determined to succeed, we may look for some guidelines which we would hope may become clear in their import as befriending and caring relationships between homosexuals and others develop.

C. Guidelines for Pastoral Care and Understanding

64. The homosexual condition is not the same as, nor does it necessarily involve, having sexual relations with one's own sex. The heterosexual condition is not the same as, nor does it necessarily involve, having sexual relations with the other sex. Those in each condition of sexual orientation can and must exercise self-discipline in accordance with the requirements of faith and the social ordering of life. Jesus Christ is Master of sex as of all aspects of life, for all people whatever their orientation.
65. If all were known, a fine story could be unfolded of lives rendered with dedication, self-discipline, and devotion to the service of Church and state, in arts and sciences, professionally and voluntarily, including the ordained ministry and other offices of the Church - and all of this by those whose only sexual inclination has been partially or exclusively towards their own sex. This is beyond dispute.
66. Patterns of homosexual behaviour, as distinct from the homosexual condition, have been, and are almost universally condemned by Christian opinion as wrong and regarded as illicit. At the same time it must be made clear that no longer can it be taken for granted that homosexuals can be 'treated' medically or 'changed' otherwise to become heterosexual. Nor is there any means of changing the exclusively heterosexual into a homosexual. In condemning homosexual acts it must be allowed that those engaged in them have no other mode of expression open to them except self-denial and control. This is a heavy burden to be borne throughout life, as is the burden of the man or woman precluded by circumstances from marriage in the ordinary way. We must not under-estimate the burdens to be borne by such people.
67. At present it is realistic to prepare the homosexual for facing in our Church such demands from most fellow Christians and by most of the public as well. We should like Church members while making these high demands on homosexuals to grant them their rights as citizens.

68. The position we have stated would be that of the vast majority in our Church, and indeed in the Churches throughout the world, in terms of their attitude towards the homosexual. We ought to recognise, however, the fact that there are in some countries a few congregations which accept self-professed homosexuals, living in settled homosexual relationships, and do not question the sincerity of their Christian faith, which they hold to be compatible with Scriptural revelation. Those who disagree with them must be ready, however contrary to their own convictions, to listen to their reasoning and seek to understand their point of view.
69. We have to talk through with our homosexual fellow-citizens and fellow Christians whether they cannot and must not accept the cross of self-denial and restraint which amounts to continence or chastity in the traditional sense. Even within heterosexual marriage continence and abstinence may have an important part to play in the interests of each partner and of society as well. In neither case are the burdens light or the yoke easy but they can be borne with the resources of Christian faith and life. In all this the support of a group can help enormously and the readiness of a congregation and its organisations to afford such support, is what can make the cross of the homosexual, as equally that of the heterosexual, bearable.
70. In urging a more tolerant and understanding acceptance of the homosexual we would also remind ourselves to keep before the homosexual the special hardships to be borne in self-acknowledged homosexuality and self-confessed behaviour patterns, however conscientiously and responsibly undertaken by any individual. It will make a difference in appointment to office in Church or community, because propensity is likely to arouse strong temptations in some situations. One may be accepted and welcomed in one circle or congregation, and find less understanding elsewhere.
71. Resources of understanding and insight are available to the minister, group or congregation desiring further education in care of the homosexual. In pastoral understanding and care in this, as in so many fields, the co-operation of social workers, probation officers and doctors can be invaluable, especially where there has been an offence or alleged offence against the law.

VI. Some Conclusions

72. Christian teaching declares that the divine or holy use of the human sexual relationship lies in the marriage of a man and woman and in family life. Any other practice, whether heterosexual or homosexual, whether for persons married or unmarried, is a shortcoming or abuse.
73. It is vital to draw the distinction between a homosexual orientation and homosexual practice. Temptation is not sin, whether for the homosexual or the heterosexual. Mental or personality disorders or handicaps, arising from birth or social conditioning, may mitigate judgment; but there is always a measure of personal responsibility for one's actions in yielding to temptation, and this is an essential mark of being human.
74. The Bible speaks more often of heterosexual than homosexual abuses and shortcomings. To treat the latter as more heinous and horrific than the former reflects social customs and values rather than Biblical principle. The same is true of sins of the "spirit" compared with sins of the "flesh". This is not to excuse or justify the one but to challenge consciences more keenly on the other.
75. The Christian Gospel challenges every man and woman, boy and girl, with the full standard of God's holiness: yet to those who penitently put their trust in Him it brings the redeeming grace of Christ, who died to save us from our sins and lives to inspire new dedicated lives in those who follow Him.
76. Human life and relationships, whether between those of the same or different sexes, extends to many things as well as sexual interaction; and sexual morality is just one aspect of moral responsibility in all aspects of our lives and conduct. To focus unduly upon sex, its use and its abuse, to the disregard of other things, is to distort morality and to misrepresent the Christian faith.
77. Our sexual nature and practices are surrounded by myths and prejudices of fashionable tolerance as well as of intolerance, by class custom and inequality of sexes, by crude verbal and even visual exhibitionism or by secrecy over what is felt to be a most personal and private matter. This demands from us the greater care in sympathetic and in sober treatment of those who may be caught up in impulses and situations which are only partly understood.
78. What is immoral need not be illegal, nor what is legally permissible taken as being moral or Christian. Even in a more truly Christian country than our own, these aims should not be confused. While legal enactments may also have some educative influence, their controls and punishments should be designed primarily for maintaining a balance in public order and personal freedom.

79. There is no moral or Christian justification for the traditional wide discrepancies in legislation against homosexual and heterosexual offences - fornication, adultery, prostitution, etc. The protection of minors or others who are socially or mentally vulnerable, and controls on commercial exploitation of sex and on offensive pornographic propaganda, are as needful in one case as the other.

80. The Church must hold up the teaching and standards set before us in the Bible, not just in this text or that but in the whole unfolding of the Gospel; and it must do so no matter what the teaching and standards of society may be. Too much has been left to secular society, both in passing judgment and in offering excuse, allowing sexual behaviour and marriage relationships to be shaped more by social custom and by social prejudices than by Christian principles and instruction, despite the prominent part played by the Church in marriage ceremonies. Too often we have failed to help both the heterosexual and the homosexual, the married and unmarried, with their problems.

81. As surely as denouncing sin the Church must seek to cherish and accept the sinner who is seeking Christ's salvation. Too often this pastoral concern seems to be buried beneath the judgmental, with consequent failure of ministry to those who, in terms of Christian ideals, have come short or gone wrong, whether they are men or women, heterosexual, homosexual, or a bit of both. It should be clear that this should not mean weakening on Christian teaching in face of the perverted sexuality found in some propaganda, but it should mean openness to the working of God's grace in all His children.

S. W. MURRAY, Convener.

Bibliography

Bahnsen, G. L., *Homosexuality: A Biblical View*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich. 1977. £2.50.

Bailey, D. Sherwin, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, Longmans Green. 1955.

Balmires, D., *Homosexuality from the Inside*. Society of Friends. Davidson, Alex., *The Returns of Love*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1970. 75p. Kenyon, F. E., *Homosexuality (Family Doctor Booklet)* B.M.A.

Kimball-Jones, H., *Towards a Christian Understanding of the Homosexual*, S.C.M. Press. 1979. £2.25.

McCourt, Malcolm, *Towards a Theology of Gay Liberation*, S.C.M. Press. 1977. £1.95.

McNeill, John J., *The Church and the Homosexual*, Darton, Longman and Todd. 1977. Moss, Roger, *Christians and Homosexuality*, Paternoster Press, Exeter. 55p.

Nadin, D., *Cause for Concern: The Christian Church and the Homosexual*, Reach 27 Blackfriars Road, Salford.

Oralson, M., *The Homosexual Question*. Search Press. £2.95.

Pittinger, N., *Time for Consent: A Christian's Approach*. S.C.M. Press. 1976. Thielicke, H., *The Ethics of Sex*, James Clarke, Cambridge. £4.75.

United Presbyterian Church, USA, *The Church and Homosexuality: Report of Committee to General Assembly*, 1978.

Wolfenden Report 1957.

Pastoral Guidelines

Homosexuality

General Assembly Resolution - 2006:

“That the General Assembly recognising homophobic attitudes within our Church and society request the Social Issues Panel to prepare guidelines to help our Church to develop more sensitive and effective pastoral care.”

1. Preamble

- 1.1 While a person's sexuality is a very important part of their lives, it does not define who they are. Biblically we as a church maintain that a person is defined in the first instance in terms of their relationship to God - creation in relation to Creator. To refer to a person as a homosexual, a lesbian or a heterosexual is therefore to narrow their identity to their sexuality alone. For this reason it seems better to refer to 'people' who have 'same sex attraction'.
- 1.2 It is clear from the study carried out by ShOut¹ (see below) that many people in churches who have same sex attraction are afraid to be open about it for fear of how they will be treated by those in their church, amongst others. There is no reason to assume Presbyterians are any different. Representatives of the Gay Helpline state that they have regular calls from people belonging to PCI who are unwilling to disclose their same sex attractions. Evidence of homophobic attitudes is therefore largely anecdotal.
- 1.3 The position of the General Assembly has been stated in other publications, mainly *'The Church and the Homosexual'* Report June 1979² with appended comment for consideration at Presbyteries. It is not the remit of this report to change that position but to suggest guidelines whereby our Church may *'develop more sensitive and effective pastoral care.'* Hence references regarding the nature of same sex attraction are made only with pastoral care in mind.

2. The need for pastoral guidelines (The experience of people with same sex attractions)

- 2.1 It is clear that people of all ages who have same sex attractions are very reluctant to tell others because of fear, prejudice etc. Keeping their feelings hidden out of fear has a significant impact on mental health.

1. ShOut – "The needs of young people in Northern Ireland who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and or transgender". December 2003. A study commissioned by the Department of Education and carried out through Youthnet N Ireland. The sample covered 362 young people from rural and urban backgrounds across the communities.

2. 'In commending the Report to the Presbyteries for study and comment, the Assembly considered it desirable: "to draw the attention of all people to the fact that the Holy Scriptures clearly condemn homosexual practices, as they also condemn heterosexual immorality, but as clearly declare to those so involved, the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ with the promise of forgiveness and strength in response to repentance and faith'.

2.2 In the ShOut study of 2003, 362 young people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and or transgender were surveyed. Among others they identified the following negative responses.

126 (35%) had suffered physical abuse

237 (65%) had suffered verbal abuse

104 (29%) had attempted suicide

95 (26%) engaged in self-harm

124 (34%) abused alcohol

Comments from the study include –

‘I am out to everyone I know except my family. I don’t want to lose my parents. A fear of being disowned.’

‘A neighbour told my parents and they threw me out, they said I was disgusting.’

‘In church groups I helped for my Duke of Edinburgh Award. When they discovered my sexuality they asked me to leave as they didn’t feel it was appropriate to have someone like me working in such an environment ie religious setting with an influence over young children.’

2.3 The Panel met with a group of young adults with same sex attractions. The majority had a Presbyterian background or were still involved in Presbyterian churches. The following is a combination of several stories and typifies common experience.

Bob’s story. *I was brought up in a strong, loving, Christian home and was very actively involved in a lively, evangelical Presbyterian church. I became a Christian when I was young and was well taught and have a real love for the Bible. I was very committed to the youth work in my church and tried to live for Christ and witness for Him inside and outside the Church. During my teens I began to realise that I was different. I found myself attracted to boys rather than girls. I didn’t choose it to be so, it just was. I resisted it, prayed against it. I understood well the Bibles’ teaching on homosexuality and wrestled to overcome my feelings and pretended to be like ‘the lads’. Eventually in my late teens I confided in a Christian friend. He continued to talk to and pray for me over a number of years. Knowing and respecting the churches teaching I practiced celibacy but felt alone, fearful and overwhelmed. The pressure of keeping it to myself, the feelings of shame, the guilt of feeling that I was living a lie and the fear of how the news would affect my parents and my church life eventually took its toll on my mental health. I had to take various medicines for depression and on one occasion came very close to committing suicide.*

People in the church would crack jokes about ‘Gays’ and I just wanted to crawl into a hole. How could I open up to them when my struggles were joked about? I respect my minister and his teaching, but when homosexuality was mentioned in church the Biblical position of calling practising homosexuality sin was outlined without ever a word of compassion or understanding for people like me who were struggling so hard and hadn’t chosen to feel the way I did.

One of my greatest struggles was that I had always been brought up to respect and to tell the truth. Yet here I was living and telling lies to protect my family and myself. Eventually I felt I had no other option but to tell my parents about my struggles. They were devastated and so were my friends at church. It is devastating when all who made you and shaped and directed your life turn on you. I am not bitter, I still love my family and respect my church but when I really needed someone to listen to me without judgement, there was no one. I would love to be straight. It would cause so much less pain but for the sake of my own sanity I have eventually had to accept that I am gay. I am both a Christian who loves God and His word but I am also gay.

The fears and struggles of parents, wives and husbands, wider family

- 2.4 'A bereavement' is a common description used by parents on hearing that their son or daughter has same sex attractions. There is also a loss of face, and of friends. *'My son lost friends and so did I.'* There can be a loss of place and respect within the church. Also there is the shattering of hopes and dreams. *'I may never have a grandchild.'*
- 2.5 It also raises difficult questions.
- How could I ever welcome a same sex partner into the home?
 - What if they want to share the same bedroom?
 - How do we approach this with the grandparents?
 - How can I continue to show the same unconditional love to my child when I cannot agree with their lifestyle?
- 2.6 Some parents come to terms with the issue by accepting and endorsing the lifestyle of their son or daughter. Others feel they cannot do so and constantly live with the tension of wanting to show unconditional love to the son or daughter while not endorsing a particular lifestyle. This is extremely difficult, as it is perceived as rejection.
- 2.7 **One mother's experience.**
- She told how her son had attempted suicide several times before he eventually 'came out'. There followed a grieving process before she came to terms with it, but still needs support. She found that she lost friends within the church and felt she had no one within the Presbyterian Church she could turn to for understanding and help. Only through external information and a support group independent of PCI was she able to find help. She found pulpit ministry difficult as it either only condemned same sex relationships or referred to people with same sex attractions in a negative light with little compassion or understanding for the struggle they go through. She has since found support in a different congregation.*

- 2.8 If this is the general experience of people in our Presbyterian Church then it is evident that here has been a lack of understanding, compassion and grace. People with same sex attractions have found that they have not been treated with the same compassion as those who have presented other pastoral needs, including those sexual in nature.

*'We drive them away from our churches, especially evangelical churches, where they assume that they will be condemned. We distort their view of God by implying that He shares our hate of gay people. Our passing remarks and sweeping generalisations in favour of 'a hard line against gays' force many silent sufferers into the misery of secret loneliness...Homophobia is out. Fear, disgust, hostility and self-righteousness are not Christian reactions. If they dominate my reactions to gay people I am not yet fit to help or counsel them; I need help and counsel myself.'*³

- 2.9 This being the case there is a need to call such attitudes sinful and for there to be repentance on our part as a church.

3. Towards a definition of 'homophobia'

- 3.1 Homophobia is usually defined as 'an irrational fear and prejudice towards homosexual people and the issue of homosexuality'.

- 3.2 **Andrew Goddard**, in Fulcrum May 2006 defines homophobia as – 'the victimisation or diminishment of human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex.' He comments that this definition is not based on 'rights' but on attitudes or behaviour 'that represent a denial of the humanity of certain people because of their imagined or actual sexual attractions, orientation, relationships or identity.'

- 3.3 The Panel believes this to be a more helpful definition for the reason stated and also because it moves away from defining a person in terms of perceived sexuality. In addition it allows us to state that taking the particular Biblical position we do, as a Church, on same sex practices is not in and of itself homophobia.

3. Pierson L, 'No Gay Areas? Pastoral Care of Homosexual Christians. Grove Booklets, Cambridge, 1997 pgs 8, 15.

3.4 It is possible therefore for evangelical Christians to hold that the factors involved in why a person has same-sex attractions may often be too complex to untangle and that there was no choice made on the part of the person to feel the way they do.⁴ We are all fallen human beings and for each one the fall has affected our sexuality as it has all aspects of our being.

3.5 However, as with all areas of sexual attraction, what we do about it as individuals is a matter of choice for which we are morally responsible. This is the sentiment behind the Assembly's comment on the Report of 1979.

When we condemn homosexual practice in isolation or single it out as somehow worse than other sexual practices outside of heterosexual marriage then we demonstrate homophobic attitudes.

4. The need to dispel myths

- 'Are our children safe?'
- 'It might be infectious'
- 'They will lead our other young people astray!'
- 'They are the cause of AIDS/HIV!'
- 'It's all about sex, sex, sex!'

There is a great need to dispel such myths about same sex attractions. Children are no more at risk and possibly less so from a person with same sex attractions than from one with heterosexual attractions. Homosexuality is NOT paedophilia! Nor is a person with same sex attractions anymore a sexual predator than someone with heterosexual desires. In fact we often show our double standards by looking on 'chasing the girls' as a natural thing even when it is downright lustful. Whereas a girl who does the same is looked on as 'cheap' and a person with same sex attractions as perverted!

Such myths are very hurtful, humiliating, degrading and condemning to those with same sex attractions. They are also characteristic of the lack of understanding that fuels homophobic attitudes.

4. Despite all attempts in the media to push the idea that same sex attraction is purely genetic the jury is still out and may remain so. While there are studies that point towards biological factors there are other studies that lean strongly towards the nurture side of the debate. The 'Gay Rights' activist Matthew Parris has accepted that the evidence is inconclusive. (The Times, 5 August 2006) Gender Development involves a variety of factors of which biological make-up is but one. It also includes family relationships, the surrounding culture and a person's unique reaction to the other factors involved. Irrespective of this the issue for evangelical Christians is what a person does about their sexual feelings. It is no more Biblically acceptable to engage in heterosexual intercourse outside of marriage than same sex intercourse. Marriage being defined as part of God's order for creation from before the Fall and between one man and one woman.

5. The need for clarity of understanding in dialogue

5.1 In our sex crazed society there are all kinds of abuses of the gift of sexual intimacy which God gave to us as part of our human identity. We are sexual beings! However, abuse of the gift, both heterosexual and homosexual does not deny the goodness of the gift.

5.2 As a church we maintain that in God's plan sexual intimacy is part of the two-into-one intimacy shared in the marriage relationship and only to be exercised in that relationship.

5.3 It is important to understand that while there are also abuses of sexual practices within the LGBT community⁵ this does not mean that all people with same sex attractions engage in them.

The abuse does not negate the principle. There needs to be the recognition within the church that the desires for love (in all its aspects), intimacy, companionship etc that move heterosexual couples towards marriage are the same desires that motivate those with same sex attractions.

5.4 When a church states that it cannot agree with practising same sex relationships it is most often taken as rejection of the person because of their perceived identity – ie 'I am a homosexual!' However, as a church, we believe our identity should be defined primarily in terms of our humanity before God and not in terms of sexual orientation. It would be helpful in dialogue if we focused more on the whole person before God and did not make sexuality the focus of our understanding.

5.5 Exploring this point of perceived identity would also promote greater understanding of those within the Presbyterian Church who wish to exercise genuine pastoral care yet maintain Biblical integrity regarding marriage as being solely between a man and a woman and sexual practice as being for that relationship alone.

5.6 There is the need for the Church to understand that a consistent approach is needed. Compassion begins in the pulpit and works out from there. Condemnation from the pulpit closes the door to compassionate care outside the pulpit. Pastoral care is built on proclamation.

5. LGBT = Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender. This is not a particularly helpful abbreviation as, at least some, identifying as homosexual or lesbian have major issues regarding bi-sexuality. The question also has to be asked if there really is such a thing as a definable LGBT 'community'. If we take the current trend towards identifying any likeminded group as a community then there are several 'communities' within the LGBT spectrum. In this sense it could be argued that the term 'LGBT community' does not help those who seek to be balanced and gracious in approach and wish to disassociate themselves from the excesses and aggressiveness of some.

- 5.7 The 'rights' dominated culture so aggressively surrounding 'gay' issues sends a message to the church that it is not acceptance as people that is being sought but rather endorsement of a way of life. The problem for many within the church is that while they would want to accept people in the name of Jesus Christ they cannot, in all integrity of conscience, endorse a way of life that they see as contrary to God's Word.

6. The aim of pastoral care

This is not the place to discuss a definition of pastoral care, but at least it involves the process of holding in one hand the person with love and care and affirmation, and holding in the other hand the Word of God, then bringing the two together. (Eugene Peterson – The Gift)

7. The need for temperate language and balance in pulpit ministry

- 7.1 Unhelpful words/statements – eg 'Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve'; 'Love the sinner, hate the sin', sodomy, unnatural, abnormal or any of the more derogatory colloquialisms. All of these lock the door to effective pastoral care before it is even open.
- 7.2 It is important for the person's family to hear some compassionate understanding of the feelings and struggles involved as well as the Biblical issues.
- 7.3 A balanced proclamation of God's Word is essential. E.g. Sexual temptation and desire is not sin; all sexual sin falls short of God's mark and can be forgiven. When we consider the *1 Cor 6* passage we might consider that perhaps there may be more idolaters, slanderers and greedy people in our congregations than "homosexual offenders". *1 Cor 6 v9 (NIV)*

8. The need for pastoral wisdom in 'first contact'

- 8.1 For a person struggling with their sexuality to tell someone may have taken months even years. They will probably have gone through a long period of mental auditioning, weighing up different friends, family members, acquaintances, before deciding whom to tell. Even then it takes a great deal of courage to 'come out'. The fear of rejection, loss of love, even hatred may be almost palpable at the point of disclosure. From that moment there is no retreat. It is therefore important that a minister, elder, leader, family member understands that their first reactions have the potential to crush or bring hope. The person will hear body language and attitude even more than words.

8.2 What they do not need to hear at that moment:

- That they are imagining it
- That they are sick
- That they are a disgrace or a pervert
- That they are demon possessed

At this point they do not even need to hear what the Bible says about homosexuality

8.3 What they do need to hear at that moment:

- That they are still loved no matter what
- That God's love has not changed
- That they have displayed great courage in telling you
- That you appreciate the trust placed in you
- That you will seek to listen and to understand what they have been going through

9. The need for long term care and possibly counselling

9.1 It is imperative to state that the role of pastoral care is NOT to force a person with same sex attractions into counselling let alone suggest demonic activity. We recognise the danger of suggesting this person is sick and needs to be healed. All of us, in various ways are in need of the healing grace of Christ.

9.2 It is sufficiently documented that there are those who have moved from the position of having same sex attractions to being heterosexual. For some this has come about through careful, professional counselling. For others it has come about by regeneration through faith in Jesus Christ. For still others a combination of both! This is entirely possible for some whose sexual identity has been part and parcel of a confused personal identity. Some may claim that such people were never truly homosexual or lesbian in the first place. That may be so and it is important to note that for many, even should they wish to undergo counselling their same sex attractions may not change.

9.3 Many teenagers experience same sex attractions. For most these do not linger but are part of their sexual development. For others their sexual development can be arrested by various factors in their upbringing including close family relationships and family breakdown. In our culture, that includes the promotion of alternative sexualities, this can result in some young people being confused about their sexuality. They may need help to understand and work through deeper-seated insecurities, issues of forgiveness, gender acceptance and self-acceptance before they can come to terms with their sexual identity.

9.4 Certain principles must be taken on board in all pastoral care and especially in this matter.

- (i) Confidentiality is paramount.
- (ii) Quick prayers and chapter and verse sticking plasters are to be avoided.
- (iii) The pastoral carer must be aware and accepting of his/her own sexual brokenness.
- (iv) The person being cared for should not be ostracised. Churches must continue to live with those who act and behave in ways seen as inconsistent with God's word – all in Christ are parts of one body, e.g. because a person has same sex attractions does not make him/her a bad musician or administrator!
- (v) When counselling help is sought, trained, skilled helpers should carry it out and the pastoral carer must be willing to refer on.
- (vi) When counselling is not sought it may be an encouragement to help the person to set personal boundaries and to be accountable. This is just as helpful with those who are heterosexual. Secular society is seeking to develop various mentoring schemes. Jesus saw the need for such mentoring with the 12 a long time ago but we have much room for improvement in the church, for youth and adults alike.⁶
- (vii) That we recognise, preach and practise the fact that our failures are not final.

10. The need for the Church to be the Church

The church has a crucial responsibility to create an environment of love, understanding, acceptance, patience, forgiveness, openness and grace.

Those with pastoral responsibility might –

- 10.1 Recognise sympathetically in services and teaching the struggles involved for individuals and their families.
- 10.2 Actively promote an atmosphere of understanding and acceptance rather than fear and rejection.
- 10.3 Provide books, tapes etc. to help individuals with same-sex attractions and their families and the congregation to be informed about the issues involved.
- 10.4 Actively promote church family intimacy and the inclusion of those with same-sex attractions.

6. As stated, the position of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is that sexual practice is only for heterosexual marriage. As a church therefore our aim ought to be to help ALL unmarried people to cope with sexual pressures. We realise this raises issues regarding celibacy. While this is an area of debate in relation to the 'hope of marriage', essentially ongoing sexual pressures still need to be controlled.

- 10.5 Actively encourage small group / cell group involvement.
- 10.6 Actively help our Youth Groups to be informed, compassionate and caring.
- 10.7 Explore the possibility of support groups (possibly linking several churches) both for those with same-sex attractions and their families.
- 10.8 Make use of the key church resources of families and appropriate friendships with older leaders to mentor and nurture young people outside their immediate family.
- 10.9 Acknowledge a person's right to a private life.
- 10.10 Our wider church might also create a PCI 'Safe Space' for those who need to talk about their sexuality.
- Such a safe space could be phoned or visited and should preserve confidentiality.
 - This place / space should stop short of being a counselling centre as the very nature of the struggle for many is that they do not feel they need counselling but do need to talk in confidence about how they feel. Some may later seek counselling help and others may not. But such a 'safe space' would be a tangible step in alleviating the cost in terms of mental health for a significant number of people within our church and would send a strong message of compassion and care to the wider community.
 - In this way a 'safe space' would provide a safety valve for Presbyterian people who feel they cannot talk to their family, minister, elders, youth worker etc.
 - Those staffing such a 'safe space' should receive appropriate training, particularly in understanding the issues involved and in Christian listening skills.

11. The need for change

Within our church there is the need for both repentance and greater understanding. This calls for education, careful listening and discussion.

- 11.2 Likewise there is the need for those who have same sex attractions to grasp that it is not easy for those who wish to be genuinely caring yet maintain Biblical integrity without giving the impression that in doing so they are rejecting the person.
- 11.3 In every way it is easier to stand at the side of the road, or in the pulpit, or 'on air' and shout condemnation. But it does not win hearts or minds. And it certainly does not show the pastoral care of Jesus Christ. It may be uncomfortable for some, but it is better to sit down and talk – but listen first.

Recommendations

That the General Assembly -

1. adopt the guidelines and advocate their use and practice within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
2. strongly state that attitudes and approaches within our congregations which, 'victimise or diminish human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex' are unacceptable.
3. encourage repentance for the occasions when persons with same sex attractions have been treated in ways severely lacking in grace within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and that the Assembly encourage an attitude of grace and mercy to be actively shown to all who struggle with different aspects of their sexuality.
4. continue to encourage our congregations to 'Create an environment of love, acceptance, patience, forgiveness and grace.'
5. that the Board of Social Witness investigates the possibility of creating 'a safe space' for people struggling with their sexuality and that funding be sought to create such a safe space.
6. that the Board of Social Witness and the Board of Youth and Children's Ministry update the 'Loving in the Real World' resource to include more instructive material on the area of same-sex attraction.
7. encourage the possibility of the establishment of parents' support group/s to help parents who are struggling with the issues surrounding young people who have 'come out'.



Assembly Buildings, Fisherwick Place, Belfast BT1 6DW

www.presbyterianireland.org