

# Seeing the world as others see it

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# Seeing the world as others see it

## **Christians and homosexuality**

A resource for congregations



# Introduction

The report, 'A challenge to unity: same-sex relationships as an issue in theology and human sexuality' was received with almost universal approval by the General Assembly in May 2007. The patient care with which the report had been put together was recognised by all. The discussion which followed was evidence of support for the vision of those who had put the report together, namely that we discuss these most difficult issues recognising our differences and our commonalities but keeping at all times to a commitment to be united and to journey together.

Other debates on homosexuality, same sex relationships and civil partnerships in many church contexts have been much less well-tempered. This resource is designed to offer a starting point for people who want to engage in this debate that allows them to listen to others in the church and interact with them, whatever their starting point.

We need to find some kind of moral and ethical root in Scripture. We also recognise that the world has moved on, and at the very least we need to try to better understand homosexuality and get more comfortable with exploring these issues because people in families and congregations are hurting because of our ignorance.

The resource offers users a number of things:

- It offers a process designed to help the conversations take place.
- It offers a vocabulary that people can learn

and use to help them have conversations about homosexuality and same sex relationships.

- It offers stories of real people, all of whom are members of or connected to the Church of Scotland. These people have stories to tell about their sexual journeys that will help all of us see that this is not simply an 'issue' but that it is ultimately about the lives of a significant minority of members of the Body of Christ.

We offer this resource to the congregations of the Church of Scotland in the hope that it will help all of us gain confidence in tackling the issues which are raised. The example of the working group that wrote the report for the General Assembly is an encouragement. It consisted of equal numbers of people from both 'sides' of the debate. In working together they realised the points at which they agreed and also where they disagreed. They had many moments of heated discussion but throughout the process they were committed to listen and talk well together, and so offer the rest of us an example that it is possible to create a safe space in which this issue can be discussed and progress made.

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# The learning process

This material can be used by individuals or in a group context. If you are going to facilitate a learning experience for a group then a programme has been included for you. Feel free to pick and mix from the elements in the programme to prepare the kind of session you feel will work in your situation.

Underlying this part of the resource is a core belief that this is a conversation that needs to take place with as many people as possible in the local church. It is not just for the leadership of the church but for everyone. We hope that local facilitators will find ways to get Elders, youth workers, Guild members, young people, attenders and non-attenders alike to get involved in this conversation.

Another underlying concern is that local facilitators remember that there may well be gay, lesbian or bi-sexual people involved in their churches and clear cognizance has to be taken of this. If such people attend an event and leave feeling condemned and unwelcome then that is not the outcome we would hope for.

Copies of the full report, 'A Challenge to Unity' can be downloaded from [www.resourcingchurches.org.uk](http://www.resourcingchurches.org.uk).

A summary of the report that was distributed to Commissioners at the General Assembly of 2007 has been included as Appendix One. This gives you an overview of the report and the key concerns that drove the discussion between members of the group that brought the report to the Assembly.

# Help

## Guidance for individuals using the resource

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It may be that you are the only person in your congregation who is interested in considering this topic or you simply want to take some time and space to do so by yourself.

The resource has a number of sections which you are free to use at your own pace:

- There are quotes from the main report for you to consider.
- There are case studies that give insights into the lives of real people who live with many of the issues the report raises.

Take your time as you go through the material and take care to write down your thoughts as you go. When you feel you have finished, perhaps it will be worth joining the forum mentioned above to share some of your reflections. Perhaps it will be you who might encourage others in your congregation to use the resource in a group context. Perhaps you will want to find someone else that from your church or community that you can discuss your reflections with.

Whatever you do, make the most of the resource and the time you spend with it.

## Guidance for facilitating a group meeting

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**Resources required:** Food, flipchart paper and pens, copies of the worksheets and case studies

**Participants:** An invited group that makes up a representative sample of people from the local church and community.

**Facilitator(s):** At least two.

### Process

Invite a group of no more than 20 people to come to a comfortable location either in the church or local community. Allow people to relax over a simple meal together so that they can get to know who is involved in this process. Be particularly supportive of older or younger people for whom this might be a very intimidating experience.

As the meal is drawing to a close, welcome the group formally and thank them for agreeing to take part in this event. Tell them that the aim of the session is to consider some of the key ideas offered by the General

Assembly report on Human Sexuality and to determine how best the issues can be taken forward in your local church.

Divide the group into either 2 or 3 smaller groups. Ensure that there is a reasonable gender and age mix in each group.

Ask the group members to introduce themselves to each other and to appoint someone who will be a scribe for the group and someone who will report back on the group's behalf.

## Step One

Indicating that one wall in the room represents the word 'agree' and another the word 'disagree', ask the participants the following questions and invite them to move to one or other wall or to stay in the middle of the room if they don't know how they want to answer each of the questions below. Take a short pause between each question to allow people to see how similar or diverse the spread of answers is in the group.

1. Homosexuality is simply a sin.
2. Homosexual orientation is not a sin but homosexual practice is.
3. Our church is a safe place for people who are gay.
4. Our church would be supportive of a gay couple entering into a civil partnership
5. Our church should never support anyone who is considering any type of long term relationship that is outside the Church's traditional understanding of marriage.

Ask participants to go back into the smaller groups and consider the following questions:

1. How did you feel to be asked these questions?
2. How comfortable were you in declaring your answers in front of the other members of the wider group?
3. How many of the questions did you have

a definite sense of an answer to and how many did you feel stuck in the middle?

4. How confident do you feel to take part in a conversation about homosexuality?

The purpose of this exercise is two-fold. First, it's an easy way into some of the core issues that will be explored and second, it gives everyone in the group a sense of how diverse or otherwise their opinions are on the issues in focus.

When people have had time to discuss the questions above, ask each group leader to give some general feedback to the whole group. Write the feedback onto the flipchart so that everyone can see it.

At this point you might want to pause and give people a moment to look at the feedback as it appears on the flipchart sheets. You might also want to offer a comment or two on how things look so far.

## Step two

Give everyone a copy of the bible passage that appears in the resource section and ask them to spend some time reading through it quietly on their own. After an appropriate amount of time ask people to discuss in pairs the ways in which this passage can be helpful for us as we begin this conversation together.

The passage has been chosen deliberately because it has nothing directly to say about the issues under discussion here but it does open up to us important themes surrounding the good news, justice, oppression, freedom, power and so on. All of these themes can be located in a conversation about homosexuality and the church.

## Step three

Give each group one of the resource sheets that appear in the appendix to this resource

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(Resource Sheets 1-3). Each group is asked to consider the quotes and to respond to the questions on each sheet.

Encourage participants to be as open as honest as they can be but to do so in a way that respects the opinions of others in the small groups.

At the end of the allotted time, take feedback from each group so that all the participants can hear about the range of issues that have been discussed. As each group completes its feedback, ask members of the other groups to comment or ask questions.

## Step four

Seven case studies have been included in the appendix (Case study 1-8) section of the resource. They each tell the story of someone who is a member of or has some kind of connection to the Church of Scotland. Each group should be given one of the case studies and should be asked to read the story and then discuss their responses to it together.

Choose the case studies you are going to use with care. It might be that you use just one case study and everyone looks at the same one. You might give each group a different case study.

Give most of the time available to this section and when it draws to a close as for feedback from each group. Encourage those who are giving the feedback to give a précis of the case study they have been considering and then a summary of what they have discussed together.

After each group has given its feedback, allow a moment's silence for people to consider what they've heard.

Split the group into pairs and ask them to consider the following questions:

- How do I feel about what I've just heard?

- What are the key issues that face our congregation if we want to be more welcoming to people who are gay, lesbian or bi-sexual?
- What might the next step be for our congregation?

Ask each group to offer its feedback by writing a summary of its discussion on a sheet of flipchart paper and put each sheet on the wall where everyone can see it.

Take some time with the whole group to review what has been offered here and to discuss its implication for the life of the local church.

## Step five

Ask the group to come back together as one large group. Ask them to consider the following questions:

- How has this experience been for you?
- Has your mind changed on any of the issues discussed?
- Have you been surprised by anything you've said or someone else has said?
- How can these issues continue to be discussed positively in the life of our congregation?

You might want to return to the exercise at Step one and repeat it to see if people put themselves in different places this time around having gone through this experience together.

## Step six

You should conclude the evening with some form of reflection or prayer. We have included an example for you in the resource section.

# A place to start

Using the Bible as a resource for our conversation

It is easy to focus on specific passages that apparently condemn one thing or give authority to another. To begin the process of thinking through the issues surrounding homosexuality and the Church, focus on the passage below and ask yourself what it offers to help you on the journey.

As this passage opens up to us generally important themes of liberation in Jesus' teaching and life, there are questions around as to what all this gospel of liberation implies.

*Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”*

*Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, ‘today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’.*

Luke 4:16-21

Consider how this passage might be applied to:

- 1) the liberation of individuals from situations or life experiences that might be considered oppressive or unhealthy.
- 2) the freeing of the Church from attitudes or assumptions that are not in accord with God’s kingdom.
- 3) challenging society with a message which proclaims the possibility of liberating change.

# Resource sheet 1

Here is a quote from the report, *A Challenge to Unity: same sex relationships as an issue in human sexuality*.

In Scotland, domestic and family relationships are currently undergoing a profound transformation. Fewer people are marrying, they are marrying later, they are not delaying sex until marriage, they are divorcing more frequently. Children are increasingly born outside marriage; gay and lesbian people are increasingly rearing children within established family units; and, as already stated, civil partnerships were introduced in 2005. These changes have involved a radical reappraisal of previously held assumptions concerning the roles of men and women and the nature of the family unit. Society's moral compass, while oscillating between different extremes, is generally pointing away from traditional Christian sexual ethics, namely, that sex is for marriage alone.

(Section 4.7.1)

understandings of sexuality and marriage?

- 4 If there are people in our community who represent other forms of relationship eg living together or civil partnership, what support if any should the church offer?
- 5 Would children from a same sex couple who have entered a civil partnership be made welcome in your church? What issues might this situation raise for your congregation?

## Questions for the group:

- 1 Do you see the societal and cultural shift that is described above in your church and community?
- 2 If you do, what impact has it had on the people involved and the community as a whole, in your opinion?
- 3 Should the Church go along with society's moral compass or should it continue to stand firm for traditional

# Resource sheet 2

Here is a quote from the report, *A Challenge to Unity: same sex relationships as an issue in human sexuality*.

The group also heard from two Church of Scotland ministers, one male, one female, who have both entered into civil partnerships with their respective partners. One of the ministers (henceforward A) described the experience of being a homosexual as follows: "I don't think I am making a choice. I am merely being the person God created me to be.... On recognition and acceptance of my sexuality it felt like another part of the jigsaw that makes up my life had been put in place.... My sexuality is part of me as integral as my eye colour and my blood group." In terms of ministry, A regrets the secrecy which A feels is still necessary, and is deeply conscious of the range of approaches A feels to homosexuality within the church, from acceptance through to toleration to condemnation. For A and A's partner, entering a civil partnership was an outward sign of their commitment to each other. A concluded: "For both of us as Christian people we wanted to honour God and place God at the centre of our relationship. For us this is a matter of bringing integrity into our faith and life."

(Section 4.9.6)

## Questions for the group

- 1 Take a moment to read the sections of the quote above that quote directly from what one of the Church of Scotland Ministers

said when they spoke with the members of the group that put the report together.

- 2 How do these words make you feel? Comfortable? Uncomfortable? Angry? Sad?
- 3 Should a minister be allowed to continue to practise as a member of the clergy once they have entered into a civil partnership?
- 4 People coming to terms with their homosexuality – does the church have a responsibility to help them do that and if so, how might that happen?
- 5 What changes might have to take place in your church for any members who are homosexual to come to a place of acceptance in terms of their sexuality?
- 6 Is there a relevant distinction between orientation and practice?

# Resource sheet 3

Here is a quote from the report, A Challenge to Unity: same sex relationships as an issue in human sexuality.

The seeming clarity of Scripture on the importance and uniqueness of the male–female relationship and in particular marriage as the context for sex, which is the very vehicle for family life and continuation of humanity, makes the possible sanctioning of same–sex blessings a sign for many of a wholly new and deficient attitude to Scripture. Scripture does not decide for us what are the right vessels for communion wine, or what Christian ministers should wear, or where baptism must take place. But Scripture does appear to be consistent that God approves of sexual union between a man and a woman, and that within marriage. The issue may then be paraphrased as defined by some as follows: *this is not about homosexuality; it is about many in the church deliberately setting aside the Bible’s teaching, a teaching which expresses clearly the will of God.*

(Section 4.12.2)

## Questions for the group

- 1 For many the place of Scripture is at the centre of this debate. Some feel that Scripture gives a clear message that homosexual practice is, and always will be, wrong. Others see homosexuality as an issue alongside the abolition of slavery and the ordination of women, things that the churches initially say ‘no’ to and then over time, and through the working of the Holy Spirit, they decide on a different interpretation for a different day and age.
- 2 Does the existence of same sex civil partnerships in your opinion diminish the uniqueness of marriage?
- 3 Do you take a traditional view of what Scripture says about homosexual practice? Do you think it is always wrong?
- 4 Do you take a different perspective and feel that the biblical texts that relate to homosexual practice connect with specific events that happened in a particular historical context?
- 5 In what way can the Bible help us through the seeming struggle to find a common point of agreement on what we say about this issue? Are there other texts we can use that will help us?

Texts which often guide readers towards a traditional understanding of homosexuality and the Christian faith include:

- Genesis 1-3, especially 1:27 and 2:24 (see report 4.13.3-4);
- Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, and Deuteronomy 23:17-18 (see report 4.13.6);
- Romans 1:18-32, 1 Cor 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1:10 and Jude 7 (see report 4.13.14-18).

Texts which often guide readers towards a Christian approach which is more accepting of homosexual lifestyles include:

- Luke 4:16-30, Galatians 3:26-29 and Acts 10:28 (see report 4.14.6-8).

# Rosemary

The many facets of the homosexuality debate have been rumbling away in the Kirk and on the pages of Ministers' Forum for years, and we are not alone - many denominations have been struggling painfully with these issues for a long time now. Issues, we are often told, that will split the church. I'm very aware that the loudest voices tend to belong to those who occupy the polarised positions, those for whom issues of sexuality (homosexuality) are black and white. I'm very conscious that I occupy the grey, middle ground. I have sympathies on both sides. I feel torn. However, I believe this middle ground is where many people - perhaps the majority - find themselves.

There's a line from a song written by Chris de Burgh that sums up my dilemma in this debate beautifully. 'It's the classical dilemma between the head and the heart'. In my head, theologically, I'm still fairly conservative, but in my heart, pastorally, I'm more and more a liberal and I struggle with reconciling the two. In my head, as a result of my up-bringing, my church background, my beliefs, the opinions of close Christian friends, the views of people I respect, I struggle with gay relationships. In my heart, when I hear stories of the hard battles gay people have coming to terms with their sexuality - an orientation they didn't choose, when I hear of the way they are treated - by family, by society but most especially by the church, when I hear of the love and acceptance and joy and contentment they have found in

friendships and relationships, and when I reflect on the unconditional, all-embracing love of God for each and every one of us, my heart goes out to them. And I'm not speaking here in a vacuum. I'm thinking of friends, people who have been a part of my life for many, many years. I'm torn between 'theology' and 'pastoral care' - the classical dilemma between the head and the heart.

The Church of Scotland is often described as a broad church - we hold together a whole

Rosemary is a Minister, based in Fife.  
She is married with two children.

spectrum of views and opinions. I believe this is one of the strengths of our Church. It's a creative tension. It's also a tough challenge.

By way of example... a few years ago, in the fall-out from the media coverage of Tom Gordon's service of blessing of a gay couple, one of my elders resigned and left the Church of Scotland. He was outraged that this minister was not censured and he told me he could not bring up his family within a Church that condoned homosexuality. At the same time another elder was supporting her son who had just told her that he was gay. She had shared with me some of the reactions there had been to this news from family and friends, reactions that ranged from violent disgust to calm acceptance. She had

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shared with me her determination to treat her son and his boyfriend no differently from her daughter and her boyfriend. She had also confessed that there were some people she just could not be honest with, mainly church folk, because she could not cope with what she believed would be their judgement on her son. People, who in most other circumstances, she would have turned to for help and support.

There are no easy answers. It is not black and white. We have to be a broad church – creative tension and tough challenge.

# Rhona

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. Luke 6:37.

*Rhona is a Reader in the Church of Scotland and lives near Falkirk.*

I love my friends, and the one thing in life I want for all of them, is that they never, ever feel, that a place where we all can feel the grace of God is within his human community, called the church. It angers me, that someone, because of their sexuality, can be rejected and feel excluded, but most of all, not loved, in the one place that God would want us all, to be equal. But, I know only too well that at some point in their lives, many of my Christian gay friends, and gay friends, have been excluded, for being themselves.

I have many different friends. Single mums, single dads, gay men, lesbians, transgendered people, married couples, depressed friends, sane and insane, Neds, Moshers, and the list goes on. I have a great belief, that when God created human beings, he created us to love one another. And each one of my mates, gay or not, have been created by God. So, if I were to believe others that the feelings a gay person has are wrong, are you telling me that God made a mistake when he created them, with their soul, and body, and got it wrong?

I have one friend who has wrestled with this all her life, rejected, unloved, created wrong, all things she was told by her church. It was

not society that told her to get lost, it was the church. The church that is based on the teaching of Christ turned away a

human being, with feelings and a soul. Each Christian is called to accept, love and nurture each other, not to judge, but to be a friend and include those in life that feel excluded. That's what Jesus would do.

# Jonathon

I first became aware of my sexuality when I was about 14 or 15. It took a while for me to realise and accept that I am gay. When I was in S2, I began to realise that I was different from the other boys; they were all talking about football and girls, neither of which were of much interest to me! Clearly there was something that made me not quite fit in. Unfortunately some of the other boys in my class realised that I was gay long before I did, just because these conversations about girls etc, this led to several years of bullying which became very depressing. School was not a great place to be during the week and then on a Sunday there was Church, which at times didn't feel much better. My Minister is very pleasant in most ways but it is fair to say he has very traditional values and he made it clear that he felt that homosexuality was completely unacceptable. I get on very well with most of the congregation but I didn't feel able to "come out" or able to speak to anyone because of the fear of what the rest of the congregation would say. I still feel this way about my home Church. I felt really isolated and had very low self esteem, there was nobody I could talk to, the only things that I heard about homosexuality from those around me were very negative. Between this and other issues at school my first four years of secondary school were a really miserable time.

Attending the youth assembly was a really great experience. The youth assembly

provided the first chances to discuss sexuality in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere through the workshops and seminars I attended: 'Sexuality and Salvation' and 'Lagoon'. It was the first opportunity that I had had to meet other like-minded people. It also showed that a group of people, LGBT Christians, actually existed! Just being with, and being able to talk to and share experiences with other people really helps to break down that isolated, "am I the only one?" feeling. The seminars talked about God's love and grace being for **all** people. This is something really

Just being with, and being able to talk to and share experiences with other people really helps to break down that isolated

special to someone who has been told for years and years that God's

love is for everyone – except them! I found that the youth assembly was one of the first spaces where I was accepted for who I am. Prior to the youth assembly I would never have believed that this space would be found at a Church of Scotland event! The youth assembly was an amazing experience; it helped me to accept who I am which was the first step to regaining the confidence which the school had taken away from me. It gave me a much more positive feeling about the Church and whether it would be possible for me to remain in the Church being gay. I feel a lot more comfortable in the Church now, knowing that there are many there who will accept me.

I believe that God is a lot more accepting than the Church can be at times although I feel that the progress is being made, something which the outside world doesn't seem to recognise. I find it very difficult to accept the "it's OK as long as you don't have a sexual relationship" argument because it rarely works in real life. Like every other human, LGBT people have a need for love, acceptance and relationships. In almost all cases a relationship (of the boyfriend/girlfriend, boyfriend/boyfriend etc kind) will turn into a sexual relationship. It's part of human life and what holds a relationship together. Personally I see no reason why LGBT people should be



denied this kind of relationship. Hopefully the next few years will prove to be a time of change, where LGBT people will become fully accepted in the Church of Scotland and their relationships blessed and celebrated.

# Harry

My first ever remembered thoughts were homosexual ones. At the age of 3 I remember being completely overwhelmed by my attraction to some young men. I still do not know why this happened. All I know is that this was and continues to be a source of incredible suffering and despair. My teenage years were probably the worst, fearing that if anyone found out about my orientation I would be completely rejected. Things were really tough especially as many of my friends at school were growing into male -models and my “falling in love” with some of them did not help. But I grew up in a Christian home and became a Christian when a child.

*I remain convinced that God could change my orientation but also accept that He has not and accept his will*

Looking back I do not know how I would have survived without God. He was always there and I was never afraid to throw all my despair and suffering onto Him. I was convinced that God loved me and wanted to be my friend whatever went on in my head and though I could not speak to my parents or my robustly heterosexual siblings I knew I could always cry out to God. Slowly I realised through my Bible reading that God was adverse to homosexual relationships. At the time this did not surprise me—and still doesn't. How can a God of love and goodness be in favour of something that is for me the cause of feeling totally overpowered, the cause of suffering?

I now believe my homosexuality is the result of how my brain is “wired”. I was 24 years old when I first felt safe enough to speak of my struggles to a counsellor. At first I was encouraged to pray about the possibility of changing my orientation—something I longed for. But nothing changed and I became deeply depressed. I remain convinced that God could change my orientation but also accept that He has not and accept his will. My mind feels like a battlefield sometimes, with my loving relationship with God on the one side and letting myself be overwhelmed by homosexual feelings on the other.

These are lonely battles so to address this 15 years ago I became a member of True Freedom Trust which seeks to complement through support what homosexual persons do not find elsewhere. This group remains my lifeline.

When asked to become an elder in my congregation which is evangelical and Church of Scotland I told my minister and a few other elders of my orientation and was pleasantly surprised to realise that that was not an issue for them. 8 years ago I was ordained a Kirk elder. Although God never seems to take away the problem he has given me incredible Christian friends whom I can contact any time when the storm in my mind becomes unbearable. These friends carry my burden with me and have also become a sort of family to me, the brothers and sisters replacing the wife and children I will never have. In His own way God finds solutions for me instead of despair.

## Case study 5

# Emily

Most of my friends are what people might term “gay” or “straight”.

I on the other hand am neither; for those who like to put people in their correct boxes, I guess I would be classed as bi-sexual. That means that I can be attracted to people of either gender. This in itself is complicated enough, especially as even some of my closest friends just laugh and call me “greedy”, but add to this the fact that I would call myself a Christian and things just get downright difficult.

My sexuality had always been something I was uncertain about. When all my friends were going out with boys I was unsure if that is what I wanted. When I met my first lesbians I felt a sense of release. That is not to say that I immediately decided I was gay, I was going out with a boy at the time, but it helped me to understand that I was maybe not as different as I thought.

Over the years I have had relationships with people of both sexes and I have to admit that it is someone’s personality that I am attracted to NOT their gender. I would like to say that I am now at a place in my life where I could be happy with my sexuality, but that is not true. I often wonder why I am the way I am? I don’t have the answer, nor do I have the ability to change.

I also have to admit that being the way that I am has helped me to drift from the Church. I realise that it may just be an excuse but I don’t think

that the Church has a place where I can feel safe, where I can talk about one of the key aspects of

my life. Its not that I want to shout about my sex life from the roof tops, but it is a part of me that I have to hide. I have found that the Church, for

all its talk, is not a place where one is really accepted unless they fit a certain mould. I could pretend, I have done so in the past, but I don’t want to do that any more; I can’t do that anymore.

*I don't think that the Church has a place where I can feel safe, where I can talk about one of the key aspects of my life*

# James

I've never had a problem with being gay. It's just part of who I am and how I encounter the world and it encounters me. Other people have a problem, of course, or I often worry that they do. I discovered early on that the Church had a problem with me being gay and that hurt a lot but I decided to live within its boundaries and lived a largely celibate life in my 20's, 30's and 40's. Now, as I have to admit that I am well into mid-life, I do wonder if I made the right choice or if the choice I made was as clear cut as I have interpreted it for all of these years.

You see, I'm from a generation that just didn't talk about any of these things. We knew it was there but we didn't talk about it in polite company. Accepting my sexuality was never an issue for me, living it out was. I think, initially at least, the Church provided a sanctuary for me to distract myself from the challenges of living life fully as a gay man. At this stage in my



life I don't think I want to do that any more.

I have good friends in the Church and over time I have chosen to be open with them about who I really am. In each case this has been a good experience – almost like being reintroduced.

I've been lucky and am aware

*I'm from a generation that just didn't talk about any of these things*

that some of my contemporaries have not and many of them no longer have an association with the Church of Scotland.

What I want now, in this new-fangled age of civil partnerships, is to be part of the Kirk, but as who I really am. If I meet someone and fall in the love with them, I hope my friends in the Church will celebrate that the way they'd celebrate any committed relationship.

I've never had a problem with being gay. It is something that has allowed me to make a unique imprint on the world. I have been able to see and do things that you couldn't have seen or done, because you're not gay. I feel very strongly for those who are left out and over time my work has become marked

by that feeling. Things that seemed hard when I was young now seem like real gifts from God that I can use in my work and life. I'm grateful to God for that.

# Michael

“Who do you think you are?” “What gives you the right to invade my privacy?” I had just entered a patient’s room as a hospital Chaplain, the patient was homosexual and was reacting to me

as a representative of the Christian religion. He had long felt victimised by Christians. He assumed I subscribed to the ‘hate the sin, love the sinner’ theology, which indeed I did. Initially my reaction was to feel

wounded by his prejudice. Then, for the first time, I recognized how my attitude wounded him. I have to thank that young man for he made me begin a process of thought which was at once profoundly uncomfortable and yet very necessary. I had blindly accepted the traditional interpretation of the relevant passages of the Bible, working out a comfortable theology, but logic doesn’t meet pain. My convictions had resulted in a mindset which reacted to homosexuality and, more importantly, homosexual people with legalism and not grace; a betrayal of the gospel. Yet I could not, try as I would, and I did try, accept homosexuality as the way God meant it to be. I found myself in no-man’s land in the debate, a very uncomfortable place to be.



My next encounter was at a party where I was greeted by a homosexual transvestite whom I already knew slightly. He was dressed as a man, but she was made up, face,

hair, nails, as a woman. I was struggling simply to accept him/her for whom he/she was. Then he began to take the conversation into his amoral life style, where he habitually used other people. My thinking went into freefall

complicated by my emotions which were in turmoil. Surely a line had to be drawn? Grace had to set limits? Or, did it? I couldn’t sit on the fence for ever. I had to come down on one side or the other.

Then I met a young man who was dying of AIDS (this was before effective medication). He was such a gentle being, gracious and welcoming, you could not do other than admire him. After our relationship had become established he shared with me his story. As a teenager he had made a profession of faith in Christ, but at the same time he was struggling with his sexuality. In his 20’s, exhausted from the struggle, he gave up on the church and entered into the gay scene, where he felt he could be himself. But a few

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years of self-indulgence and permissiveness left him disillusioned and dissatisfied. He extricated himself, vowing to maintain celibacy. This he could not sustain and he was to have two serious relationships. When his diagnosis came however he felt the only responsible thing to do was to maintain celibacy. This left him feeling profoundly alone. We talked in the months before his death, not of homosexuality but of faith, for what amazed him through all the turns of his life was that he felt Christ had never left him. It was a privilege to be entrusted with such confidences and increasingly I recognised his integrity in all the pain and struggle of his life. The last thing we needed to discuss was the theology of homosexuality, this was irrelevant as we spoke of more important things.

This led me on to reflect on the gay couple whom I meet socially from time to time. I have got so used to them that I almost forget that they are homosexual.


They don't flaunt it; they just are who they are and

I realise that I have come to accept them as a couple and to recognise that they are good as a couple. How much easier it would be if somehow the whole issue of people's sexuality could not be an issue.

Avoidance of the issue may be easier but it is not really an option. My encounters with homosexual people over the years have produced angst in me. I have been forced to face my own insensitivity and prejudice. I have been disgusted by trite pietism and easy pre-packaged answers from both sides of the debate. Friends have been wary of my reluctance to be dogmatic. At times I have longed to be free from my theology. But, in the end of the day I continue to live with the tension, unable to resolve the

contradictions in my thinking. My emotions and my pastoral heart are not at ease with my theology.

Here I stand I can do no other.



*The last thing we needed to discuss was the theology of homosexuality, this was irrelevant as we spoke of more important things*

# Closing Reflection

## LORD

At the end of our time together, we take a  
moment

To become aware of ourselves,  
of our breathing in and out.

To become aware of each other,  
of the ties that bind us and the situations that  
keep us apart.

To become aware of you,  
of the One who made us and knows us and  
lives within and around us.

In this moment, Lord, help us to gather  
up what we need to take away from this  
experience and to leave behind that which  
will not help us.

Help us to be a church for those who are firm  
and those who are broken.

Help us to be a church for those who fit in  
and those who feel left out.

Help us to be a church where we live life  
together honestly

In the power of your Spirit.

Amen

# Appendix I

## Summary of the Report to the General Assembly of 2007

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### **1 The context of the debate (see 4.2 – 4.9.9)**

Matters of sexuality, and in particular homosexuality, have been of interest and concern within the Church of Scotland and the world church over recent years. This report is a further contribution to the theological debate on questions in homosexuality, which we present to the General Assembly at a time when the place of faith alongside the institution of civil partnerships has been extensively discussed.

Christian accounts of sex and sexuality have traditionally located marriage as the only appropriate context for sex. Homosexuality, both as the desire for one's own sex and expressed in same-sex genital activity, was perceived as being wrong. Churches, however, have been looking closely at their doctrine and practice, with some theological approaches to the moral questions in the sexual arena proposing different approaches and solutions – though not without controversy.

The debates are not merely theoretical. As well as societal shifts in understanding and legislative provision, within the church there are Christians, including ordained persons, who would identify themselves as gay or lesbian, some determined to be celibate, some more active in their lifestyle, with some who have entered civil partnerships. Arguments raise passion and difference; and there are also basic issues of prejudice and discrimination needing to be worked through.

From the outset, therefore, let us seek to understand the terms of the debate, and to listen to the various voices.

### **2 The interpretation of the scripture (see 4.10 – 4.14.12)**

Scripture is authoritative within a Reformed Church such as ours. But that authority will affect different readers in different ways – in that they will employ various methods of interpretation. There is a plurality of measures of weight and emphasis being accorded to certain passages or themes of Scripture. Thus, whether in a more “traditionalist” reading or one which could be characterized as “revisionist”, the issue of the Church's approach to homosexuality can be about whether the Church is faithful to the will of God revealed in Scripture. Some, however, incline to clearer conclusions than others: it is then, though there are no doubt other

elements which contribute to the formation of theological convictions and responses to the issue, that this matter of fidelity to Scripture and to God becomes potentially church-dividing for many Christians.

Traditionalist interpretation lays weight on the consistency of Scripture in upholding the male–female relationship and the institution of marriage in particular. Insofar as Scripture treats same–sex sexual activity, it is presented as a wrong choice. In the context of the New Testament, such instruction as there is on matters of sexuality shares with ethical questions more generally an emphasis on the importance of following Christ, of living lives of holiness, love, generosity and faithfulness.

Revisionist interpretation, dwelling on the particular historical, cultural and social contexts in which the Bible was written, inclines to treat more critically particular proscriptions of behaviour. Furthermore, revisionist interpreters find in Scripture a strong critique of practices which are unjust, or exclusivist. They argue that just as Biblical principles have been found to support justice for women, slaves and black people, so they may support an open, welcoming approach to homosexuality and homosexual activity.

*No Christian approach can bypass the Bible, but the interpretative task is obviously challenging when Christians can make very different readings.*

### **3 Theological approaches (see 4.15.1 – 4.15.2.9)**

Traditional theological arguments on homosexuality claim it is unnatural, not respecting the complementarity of men and women, and not open to the possibility of procreation.

But counter–arguments are often made, that

much human activity is unconventional without being seen as wrong, that complementarity is more a matter of apposite people rather than opposite sexes, and that much heterosexual sex is not open to the possibility of procreation either.

Indeed, some revisionists go on to suggest that because homosexuality is a feature of creation, it is a given, and should be accepted as such as part of life’s rich tapestry.

But the traditionalist may offer the rejoinder that homosexual orientation may be influenced by both nature and nurture; and there is certainly no overwhelming consensus on its causes. But even if it could be shown that homosexuality was not in and of itself a sign of creaturely sinfulness, the significance of self–discipline within Christian life would still be highly relevant.

*Conclusions drawn from understandings of what is “natural” are problematic for the Church’s reflection on issues of sexuality.*

### **4 Drawing threads together (see 4.16.1 – 4.16.2.9)**

The first step forward is to develop a Scriptural framework for the Christian understanding of sexuality, which understands that any sexual activity, as with all human action, is sometimes good and sometimes not.

The problem remains in the estimation of homosexual acts, given that some see all such acts as instances of disorder and disobedience but others do not, in that they see some homosexual activity as permissible within God’s purposes for our salvation.

The question then for Christians who are homosexually inclined is how should they follow Christ, and in particular, what forms of intimate human relationship are appropriate. A variety of responses continue to be explored – friendship, celibacy and the chaste sexual

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relationship. It is possible that any of these may be taken into a long-term partnership which is analogous to, though not the same as, marriage.

*How “does the homosexually-inclined person show Christ to the world”? How will that fully human person join in the Church’s mission and discipleship?*

## **5 Conclusion (see 4.17.1-9)**

The Church holds much more in common than that which divides us. And even on matters sexual, there is an agreed emphasis on chastity, and the conviction that our sanctification will be fulfilled in the encounter with the God of perfect love and judgement, in the consummation of all things. Nevertheless, current debates reveal controversy which is highly charged. This Report urges – for all that this will not produce an early resolution of tensions – that close-fought, majority decisions through church courts are not the way forward. Rather, encounter and exchange are productive, as are prayer, confession of sin, humility, a breadth of vision.

Let us remember that there are still aspects of sexuality and sexual activity at the very least questionable on which the church may find common ground. And on homosexuality, we will not censure people of homosexual orientation; there is no bar to such people being church members, Elders, Ministers or Moderators. However, we continue to have severe differences as to the appropriateness of homosexual sexual activity within a life attempting to be faithful to our holy and merciful God.

*Christian unity implies diversity, but that does not solve the problem of the limits of diversity. Nevertheless, through these testing times we insist there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (cf. Ephesians 4. 1-6).*

# Appendix 2

## Other resources

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### Available on DVD

*Priest* – shows the conflict experienced by a young Roman Catholic priest as he struggles to reconcile his calling to ministry with his homosexuality. Shows how our sexuality is not just a private matter but has an impact on our immediate community.

*Transamerica* – shows the story of a pre-operative transgendered woman as she comes to terms with her ‘old’ life before the final stages of the process of swapping genders.

*The Laramie Project* – a documentary-style film that shows the impact of the brutal killing of a young gay man in Laramie, Wyoming. Again this shows the way sexuality is something that happens in a public realm.

*Philadelphia* – one of the first major feature films that highlighted the issue of HIV and AIDS. Shows some of the stigmatisation that people with HIV/AIDS face as they struggle to belong. Is a bit dated now but still worth watching.

*Brokeback Mountain* – the story of the relationship between two men from very traditional western communities in rural America. Is particularly interesting because it illustrates the pressures to conform that we can all experience when we live in small communities.

### Websites

[www.resourcingchurches.org.uk](http://www.resourcingchurches.org.uk) – download the main report that went to the General Assembly here.

<http://www.religioustolerance.org/homosexu.htm> – a good website that gives insight into common perspectives on homosexuality.

[www.mcchurch.org](http://www.mcchurch.org) – the website of the worldwide Metropolitan Community Church, a church that describes itself as having a ‘special outreach’ to those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered.

[www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk](http://www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk) – an organisation that seeks to support those with ‘homosexual tendencies’ who believe it is wrong to express them in a physical relationship.

[www.disciplescotland.org.uk](http://www.disciplescotland.org.uk) – a website designed to address the question of homosexuality and the Bible.

[www.christianscotland.org](http://www.christianscotland.org) – homepage of the Christian Institute in Scotland. Puts forward a traditional perspective on homosexuality, marriage and civil partnerships.

[www.onekirk.org](http://www.onekirk.org) – working for an inclusive, affirming and progressive church.

[www.affirmationscotland.org.uk](http://www.affirmationscotland.org.uk) – an emerging group in the Church of Scotland that seeks to affirm LGBT Christians in the Kirk.

All websites were active at the time of going to print. The Mission and Discipleship takes no responsibility for the content of these websites.

# Appendix 3

## Vocabulary Sheet

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Here are some terms that might help you in your discussions:

Homosexual:	Often used for a man who is sexually attracted to people of the same gender, but properly used for anyone attracted to a person of the same gender (it's from the Greek homos, same, not from the Latin homo, man]
Gay:	A generic term for people who are homosexual. Often heard in contexts like 'the gay community'. Sometimes seen as more often relating to homosexual men.
Lesbian:	A woman who is sexually attracted to people of the same gender.
Bi-sexual:	Someone who is sexually attracted to people of either gender.
Transgendered:	Someone who appears like someone of the opposite gender to themselves.
Transexual:	Someone who has undergone a sex-change operation.

Asexual:	Someone who would contend that they have no sexual identity at all.
Civil Partnership:	A legal process same sex couples can go through to have their relationship recognised in law. Has many of the advantages associated with marriage.
Abstinence:	Choosing not to engage in sexual activity at all.
AIDS:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome is associated with the last stages of the development of the HIV virus.
HIV:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus is an infection that erodes the body's ability to fight infection and disease.
Celibacy:	Whether chosen or not, having no relationship that is overtly sexual. Often used of priests who do not marry.
Homophobia:	Fear or hatred of people who are gay, lesbian or bi-sexual.
Monogamy:	Commitment to one person in a long-term relationship.
Sexual orientation:	Blanket term relating

to the gender of the person we find sexually attractive.

Straight: A heterosexual – someone who is attracted to people of the opposite gender.

LGBT: The common acronym used to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered individuals or the LGBT community as a whole.