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Hear Our Voices: Pastoral Care For the LGBTQ Community

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Abstract

The purpose of this pastoral care project is to hear the voices of the LGBTQ community regarding their needs of pastoral care for the challenges of "coming-out", rejection and depression and the celebrations of marriage and Pride. Seven clergypersons were interviewed and nine clergypersons completed the clergy survey. Two of the nine surveys were from Spanish-speaking pastors and these surveys were translated into English. Forty-four LGBTQ lay people completed the lay survey. One of the lay surveys was from a Spanish-speaking individual and it was translated into English. A word analysis was performed on the interviews and the surveys to identify frequently used terms related to strategies of pastoral care. The report combines information on the challenges and celebrations and strategies to fulfill the pastoral care needs as indicated by the survey and interview participants. The project also supplies wedding and referral resources.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Theological Rationale and Reflection

Throughout scriptures from Genesis to Revelation we are reminded over and over again to hear the voice of God. We are admonished to hear God's voice and obey. We are questioned as to why we did not obey when we hear the voice of God. We have wonderful examples like Noah, Moses, Jonah, Paul, and Peter who weren't always the best listeners but once they heard the voice of God it changed their lives forever.

We are also told to lift our own voices. We therefore, lift our voices in praises and in supplication. In the Psalms there are many verses that contain information, requests, and admonitions when we call upon God. Psalm 18:6¹ says, "In my distress I called upon the Lord, to my God I cried for help. From God's temple God heard my voice, and my cry to God reached God's ears." We also hear one requesting that God hear them in Psalm 64:1, "Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; preserve my life from the dread enemy." Peter is instructed in the 10th chapter of Acts by the voice from heaven to remember "what God has made clean, you must not call profane."

¹ All scriptures are quoted from the New Revised Standard Version and have been inclusified to be gender neutral.

I believe that God always hears our voice when we cry out, when we lift up petitions, when we groan from our hearts when words fail us and that God knows our thoughts, our voice before we can even utter words. I also believe that we hear God when we are attuned to God, or when we want to hear God or when we practice a spiritual discipline of listening for God. For many, this could be a hit or miss endeavor depending upon one's spiritual maturity. Yet what we humans truly miss is hearing one another's voice.

As I worked on assignments for pastoral care classes I began to notice a missing voice. Missing was the voice of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community. Many heterosexual authors would write books on how to provide pastoral care or counseling to the LGBTQ community and there wouldn't be a single story or quote from an LGBTQ community member. I presumed that the authors decided themselves what the community needed in the means of pastoral care.

Over time and as I expanded my reading list, I began to encounter books and magazine or journal articles that were written by lesbian or gay authors, yet there was still a lack of voices from the LGBTQ community that would indicate what they needed in pastoral care. It wasn't until I was half-way through this project that I came upon the book "Ministry Among God's Queer Folk" by David J. Kundtz and Bernard S. Schlager in which

I encountered a gay author and the voice of the LGBTQ community within its pages.

It was the lack of LGBTQ voices that drew me to this project. As we need to listen to the voice of God in our lives to give us guidance, we too, need to listen to our communities (whatever their makeup) and our parishioners to hear what they say are their needs, to hear what they are looking for in pastoral care. Without their voices we make assumptions of what they want or need. I believe this is especially true when an underserved population like the LGBTQ community has been unheard and not able to shout out with their own voice.

Just as the only way to truly know someone's sexual orientation is to ask them, the only way to truly know what members of the LGBTQ community need in the way of pastoral care is to ask them. I believe that is exactly what I did in this project.

I believe that through the process of interviewing pastors (both straight and gay) and receiving surveys from lay people of the LGBTQ community, I have heard and listened to the voice of the community. I believe I have been faithful in letting my reader hear the voice of the LGBTQ community and provided methods of pastoral care that corresponds to the wants of the LGBTQ community.

Major Goals of the Research Project

The goal of this research was to identify "best practice" strategies of care used by experienced pastoral caregivers in ministering to people who are LGBTQ around the challenges and celebrations of LGBTQ people; specifically the challenges of coming out, rejection and depression and the celebrations of marriage and Pride.

As I explored these strategies I looked to gather information of local agencies and people (community service providers such as counselors, therapists and physicians), that LGBTQ people can be referred to who are open and affirming of the LGBTQ community. The gathering of these "best practice" strategies and referral information was a goal outcome of this project. This has led to the production of a "resource guide" to complement the skills and pastoral care resources pastors already possess and provides needed information for pastors and seminary students who might be new to working with persons of the LGBT community.

The final goal was to evaluate informally my own pastoral care skills and as needed focus on improving my own skills as a pastoral caregiver using the suggested strategies of other experienced pastors.

Research Methodology

This project included the combination of original research and published information. The original research included surveys and face to face interviews. The published information included sources that center on pastoral care and sources that dealt with the LGBTQ community.

This project included:

- A resource guide of the “best practice” strategies for challenges and celebration, which has been reviewed by pastors of various faiths. To create the resource guide the following activities were included:
 - o Research to get a good grounding in the foundations of pastoral care in general and an overview of what scholarship was already present for pastoral care to people who are LGBTQ.
 - o Clergy surveys: A survey was made available to pastors of the Metropolitan Community Church denomination to obtain their “best practice” strategies of pastoral care for challenges and celebrations of LGBTQ persons. This survey was placed on the MCC Clergy Facebook page to facilitate reaching as many pastors as possible. The survey was also translated into Spanish and sent to the Spanish-speaking pastors of MCC through Rev.

Elder Hector Gutierrez, the Associate Director of the Office of Emerging Ministries.

- o Lay survey: A survey was provided to my current church members and regular attendees, to hear from them what successful strategies they have been given to deal with the challenges of coming out, rejection, and depression and the celebrations of "Pride" and marriage in their own lives as a member of the LGBTQ community. A paper copy of the lay survey was made available to approximately 100 people. An additional lay survey with an additional question of "which MCC do you attend" was sent by mail to five MCC churches in Florida and Pennsylvania. These included God's Acre MCC in Ocala, Florida; MCC of the Lehigh Valley in Bethlehem, PA; SunCoast Cathedral MCC in Venice, Florida; First Coast MCC in St. Augustine, Florida, and Vision of Hope MCC in Mountville, PA.
- o Interviews with pastors of other denominations of "open and affirming" congregations were conducted to obtain their strategies for pastoral care to LGBTQ members and/or attendees and the resources they use with the LGBTQ community. Seven face to face interviews were completed. Pastors were from the United Methodist Church (Reconciling Ministries),

Presbyterian USA, United Church of Christ, Oasis
Ministry for Spiritual Development, and Missionary
Baptist.

Chapter 2 Pastoral Care and the LGBTQ Community

Pastoral care is one of the functions and responsibilities of a clergyperson toward those within their care through the congregation or parish. Pastoral care involves dealing with an individual or a family who is in crisis due to spiritual crises and life circumstances. "Every crisis is a spiritual emergency in which the care of a sensitive and professional pastor can make the difference between hope and hopelessness, courage and cowardice, and responsibility and helplessness."² Pastoral care also deals with the day to day interactions of the people one serves. Pastoral care "involves dealing with people who talk of practical, everyday problems more than they talk of God."³ Pastoral care usually involves those within ones local congregation or parish but may include those in the surrounding geographical community or beyond. Within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered communities, it is not unusual to have church attendees or members who will travel an hour or more to attend a worship service or activity.

In my current church I serve individuals and families who live in six different counties in south central Pennsylvania and

² Bruce Gordon Epperly and Katherine Gould Epperly, *Tending to the Holy: The Practice of the Presence of God in Ministry* (Herndon, Va: Alban Institute, 2009), 90.

³ John Patton, *Pastoral Care: An Essential Guide*, Abingdon Essential Guides (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 9.

some travel one hour to attend Sunday worship services. I also serve many in the wider community who are not members or attendees of any church. These folks look to me as the "gay" pastor in the community due to my affiliation with the Metropolitan Community Churches, a denomination that was started in 1968 by Rev. Elder Troy Perry to minister to the LGBTQ community by LGBTQ clergy and the LGBTQ lay religious members.

An example of working with the wider LGBTQ community includes my receiving calls from the chaplain at the Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute in Harrisburg to see a patient. If a patient has asked to speak to a "gay" pastor, the chaplain will call me and let me know that there is an inpatient who would like to speak to a "gay" pastor. I put gay in quotation since the patient is specifically asking for a gay pastor and not an open and affirming pastor or their own pastor if they have one.

Pastoral care is "a ministry of compassion and its source and motivation is the love of God."⁴ Pastoral care is "a response to the need that everyone has for warmth, nurture, support, and caring."⁵ Pastoral care is "the establishing and nurturing of a caring relationship between and among people that is based on

⁴ David G. Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2003), 19-20.

⁵ Howard John Clinebell and Bridget Clare McKeever, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth*, Updated and rev. / Bridget Clare McKeever (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 46.

religious faith.”⁶ Our task as pastors “is to present images of hope and new life to people for whom, at the moment, the future appears bleak and uncertain.”⁷

Pastoral counseling is a component of pastoral care. Pastoral counseling deals with the therapeutic needs of an individual. A pastoral counselor will listen to an individual with the intent of providing intensive psychotherapy.⁸ Beyond the basics of spiritual-biblical counseling and pre-marital counseling, those who engage in pastoral counseling would require additional training in therapeutic methodology. Many times when there are severe crises and mental illness referrals to licensed professionals is the best and preferable course of action. Licensed professionals who have been trained to be spiritual or pastoral counselors have had specific and extensive education and expertise.⁹

This training goes beyond what a clergyperson will receive in a Masters of Divinity program at a seminary in one’s pastoral care classes. The licensed professional will devote a much longer period of time to help a patient than a pastor could due to the severity of the issue or problem. The licensed

⁶ David Kundtz and Bernard Sloan Schlager, *Ministry Among God’s Queer Folk: LGBTQ Pastoral Care*, The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 15.

⁷ Epperly and Epperly, *Tending to the Holy*, 90.

⁸ Robert J. Wicks and Thomas E. Rodgerson, *Companions in Hope: The Art of Christian Caring* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 42.

⁹ Wicks and Rodgerson, 42.

professional is also better equipped to deal with multiple problems an individual may have at one time. Also the licensed professional is able to provide medication if this is a needed path of treatment. For both the pastoral care giver and the pastoral counselor confidentiality is a key component when dealing with someone who is seeking pastoral care. For the pastoral counselor the information shared becomes a legal issue and might only be shared with permission from one's client or a court order. For the pastoral care giver the information becomes an ethical issue of confidentiality.¹⁰

Therefore, this project does not deal with pastoral counseling. Specifically this project is about pastoral care by a non-therapeutic licensed clergyperson or non-therapeutically trained lay person to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBTQ) attendees or members of one's congregation or parish.

The purpose of pastoral care is to "enable spiritual healing and growth."¹¹ The pastoral care giver is to help those in their care to grow in their spiritual lives as they deal with their daily challenges and empower them to deal with all aspects of their lives. The pastoral care givers are "called to be God's healing partners, sharing the grace we have received in ways

¹⁰ Wicks and Rodgerson, 19.

¹¹ Clinebell and McKeever, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 103.

that bring comfort, transformation, clarity, and wholeness to those whose lives we touch.”¹²

People of the LGBTQ community deal with most of the same life issues like anyone else such as death, depression, dysfunctional families, or possibly abuse in all its manners. Yet there are challenges that LGBTQ people deal with that are not challenges for heterosexual people. A couple of examples of the challenges that LGBTQ people encounter are “coming out” and rejection (these topics will be dealt with more in future chapters). Until June 26, 2015, the LGBTQ community had to deal with the challenge of not being allowed to marry legally and many people continued to work for marriage equality until the rite was available to all people. Without the rite of marriage many LGBTQ couples struggled to deal with the time consuming and costly legal paper work to protect their finances, property and to have their wishes fulfilled after death. Therefore a pastoral care challenge for the pastoral care-giver now is to determine how to celebrate same-sex marriages in churches that might be dealing with the question of being open and affirming of full inclusion of the LGBTQ community from church membership, clergy ordination and church rites like marriage.

Gay and lesbian families with children also have the additional challenge of dealing with the social stereotype

¹² Epperly and Epperly, *Tending to the Holy*, 90.

assumption that their children are or will become disadvantaged or will turn out as gay or lesbian due to having LGBTQ parents. In providing pastoral care for the LGBTQ community and their challenges what is needed is the establishment of a relationship with the LGBTQ individual(s).

"Pastoral Care is the creation of a relationship which aspires to 'holy ground'. Pastoral care ultimately is the creation of a relationship wherein the people involved feel the same compelling power of love, awe, wonder and desire for freedom with which Moses was struck when he entered upon holy ground around the burning bush, the sign of God's presence."¹³ To establish a relationship the pastoral care giver should become knowledgeable of the individual before a care need arises. The pastoral care giver should know their congregation or parish members and attendees; their needs, their spiritual maturity, their past and present circumstances, and their background; familial and cultural. This would become especially important in dealing with individuals who are from a cultural background different than the pastoral care giver. This includes the cultural backgrounds of cultures within cultures like the LGBTQ community. LGBTQ people can be considered as bicultural since they grow up in a heterosexual dominant culture and their unique

¹³ Sally M. Boyle, *Embracing the Exile: A Lesbian Model of Pastoral Care* (Ontario Canada: Artemis enterprises and The United Church Publishing House, 1995), 14-15.

experiences due to homophobia and same-sex pairing causes them to depart from the dominant culture.¹⁴

Pastoral care givers need to "understand the developmental issues that shape the identity of gays and lesbians, to cut through some of the confusion that most pastors feel when dealing with the relationship systems in which gays and lesbians live, and to foster a more sensitive, constructive, and healing attitude among caregivers toward gay Christians who cry out for pastoral assistance."¹⁵ Due to years of messages of condemnation and discrimination many LGBTQ members and attendees will be difficult to identify as they hide in plain sight and keep their identity a secret and remain closeted. Therefore understanding and acceptance are important tools of the pastoral care giver. According to Philip Culbertson in writing about pastoral theologian James Nelson's schematization of possible attitudes toward homosexuality, one should "not attempt pastoral work with gays and lesbians"¹⁶ without being fully committed to acceptance that same-sex orientation is a given.

For pastoral care givers who are straight it is imperative that they learn about the personal and social issues that

¹⁴ Thomas W. Johnson and Michael S. Keren. 1998. "Chapter 24: the Families of Lesbian Women and Gay Men." In *Re-Visioning Family Therapy: Race, Culture, and Gender in Clinical Practice* edited by Monica McGoldrick. (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 320-21.

¹⁵ Philip Leroy Culbertson, *Caring for God's People: Counseling and Christian Wholeness* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 190.

¹⁶ Culbertson, 193.

confront LGBTQ persons. Through the negative actions of a dominant culture, the privileged culture, whether intentional or through ignorance; many underserved, underrepresented, suppressed minority groups like the LGBTQ community have lived with condemnation, loathing, fostered doubt, and self-hatred for years, making it difficult for the LGBTQ person to come out.

Pastoral care givers need to create an atmosphere of trust and safety. LGBTQ people need a safe place. A place where one can be who they are without worry of discrimination and harm whether physical or mental. A place where they do not have to pretend to be someone they are not. After years of dealing with hostile environments it is difficult for LGBTQ people to step out of the closet where it is safer. Church sanctuaries should be sanctuaries; places that are: a refuge from possible harm, a place that invites one to grow spiritually without condemnation, a place of protection and shelter, and a sacred place of wholeness. Pastoral care givers should also be sanctuaries; people who provide a refuge, who help LGBTQ people find their full spiritual potential, who inhabit a place and offer that place of protection and shelter and who reside within their own spirit in a place of spiritual wholeness and share that wholeness with others. As part of the atmosphere of trust and acceptance, pastoral care givers need to "provide an intentional

welcome to the gifts that LGBTQ people bring to a faith community."¹⁷

Prior to engaging in pastoral care with LGBTQ people there are some questions that the care givers need to answer about themselves to clarify their own position. One question would be "Am I Open?" Am I open to working with LGBTQ people? Am I open to hearing what they need and willing to help them meet those needs? Am I willing to listen to their concerns, their problems and their life experiences especially the sexual experiences? Another question might be "Do I care?" Do I care to interact with LGBTQ people? Deep down do I care what happens to LGBTQ people in my community or do I only truly care about the straight people in my community? Am I homophobic or transphobic? If one's feelings toward the LGBTQ community are truly negative, then one should refer the individual to another care giver.¹⁸

¹⁷ John Hobbs, "Climate of Care: Pastoral Ministry to Gays and Lesbians," *The Christian Century* 125, no. 5 (March 11, 2008): 34.

¹⁸ Kundtz and Schlager, *Ministry among God's Queer Folk*, 19-27.

Chapter 3 Methodology and the LGBTQ Voice

All pastoral care givers need strategies to deal with challenges. Therefore in this project I have selected three challenges; coming out, rejection, and depression, to research and from the results of interviews and surveys will provide strategies to assist with dealing with the challenge. Also chosen for research are the celebrations of LGBTQ Pride and Same-sex Marriage. Same-sex marriage was chosen due to the recent change in the national marriage law. LGBTQ Pride was selected due to its uniqueness. In scriptures and admonitions were are taught within the church not to be prideful, yet in celebrating LGTBQ Pride one is celebrating who one is as an LGBTQ individual. Celebrating Pride combats the years of hearing that one is a deviant individual, an abomination in the eyes of God, a sick individual, an individual in need of fixing or psychological care, a sexual predator, or an unacceptable person due to being LGBTQ. Celebrating Pride celebrates our wholeness as LGBTQ people in whatever form one chooses to express themselves. In the church setting Pride is a celebration of our wholeness as LGBTQ person and as people of faith who are loved by God.

John Hobbs says that "creating a climate of care begins with listening. LGBTQ people should define their needs and set

the agenda, otherwise care slips into being paternalistic or patronizing.”¹⁹ Therefore hear the voice of the LGBTQ community.

In this project seven pastors, who are currently pastoring or have recently pastored LGBTQ folks within their congregations, were interviewed. While not all are LGBTQ themselves, it was felt that it is important to hear from those who are working with the LGBTQ community and are engaged in ministry outside of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) denomination. These pastors are from the United Methodist Church (Reconciling Ministries), United Church of Christ, Missionary Baptist, Presbyterian (USA), and Oasis Ministries for Spiritual Development. Oasis Ministries is a non-profit corporation which offers ecumenical training programs in spiritual direction and contemplative prayer practices. The executive director, who was interviewed, is ordained through the UCC denomination.

Three of the pastors are homosexual (lesbians) and four are heterosexual (males). Their years of pastoral experience range from 13 years to 37 years and have a range of two months to 16½ years at their current ministry. Six of the pastors identified as white and one as African American. All seven were asked the same questions regarding their strategies used in pastoral care for the LGBTQ community members. Specifically the strategies used to help in three challenges faced by most of the LGBTQ

¹⁹ Hobbs, “Climate of Care,” 34.

community: coming out, rejection, and depression. They were also asked to share their strategies for celebrating LGBTQ Pride and LGBTQ marriage within their congregations.

The interview responses were reviewed and analyzed and key words "popped" up as frequent responses. For the challenges key words were: talk with, listen to, met with, walk with, and refer. Strategies for celebrating include: listen to, walk with, and included participate in, as in the pastor participating in celebrations.

This project also included two sets of surveys. One set of surveys was completed by the clergy members of Metropolitan Community Churches. The second set of surveys was completed by lay people, most of whom are attendees or members of Metropolitan Community Churches in Florida and Pennsylvania. Nine clergy surveys were received from clergy within the MCC denomination from around the United States and in Latin America. Surveys were translated into Spanish and provided to MCC/ICM (ICM - Spanish translation of MCC) Iberoamerica Caribbean churches which include South America, Central America and the Caribbean islands. Two surveys were returned and translated into English. Eight clergy identified as homosexual and one chose not to reply to the sexual orientation question. Four are female, three are male, 1 identifies as queer and 1 identifies as

male/female. Seven identify as white, one as mixed white, and one as Latino.

The clergy surveys asked for strategies for pastoral care for the challenges and celebrations being researched. Additionally the survey asked for strategies that might be used specifically for African Americans, Asians, Hispanic/Latinos, and other minorities. The survey replies were reviewed and analyzed with key words noted. The key words noted from the questions related to challenges were: listen, talk, counsel, refer, and resources (resources to be given to those in need). The keywords noted from the questions related to celebrations were listen and resources.

Forty-four surveys were received from lay people. The surveys came from three Metropolitan Community Churches in Pennsylvania, three from Metropolitan Community Churches in Florida, and one from ICM in Central America. Six surveys came from the LGBTQ Community Center who invited me to come and talk about my project and agreed to complete the survey whether they were church attendees or not. Thirty-two of the responders identified as homosexual, 2 females identified as heterosexual, 6 as bisexual, 3 as transgendered persons (FTM - female to male), and 1 chose not to identify their sexual orientation. Twenty identified their sexual identity as female, twenty-one as male, 1 as queer, 1 as two-spirited, and one chose not to self-

identify. Thirty-eight identified as white, 2 as African American, 1 as Native American, 1 as half-blood, 1 as Hispanic, and 1 as human. Thirty-eight were identified as attendees or members of Metropolitan Community Churches, 1 identified as Catholic, one as Brethren, one as Lutheran, and 3 did not have any church affiliation.

The surveys for the lay people were similar to those used for clergy but asked what strategies a clergy person had used to help them with the challenges of coming out, rejection and/or depression. The surveys also asked how their pastor celebrated Pride and marriage in their church setting. Again the responses were reviewed and analyzed and key words in the responses were noted.

When asked about Coming Out the key words noted were listening, presence and encourage. The challenge of rejection also included the key words of listening and encourage. Strategies used for challenge of depression included key words of listening and encourage and the survey participants also added the key word refer. When it came to the celebrations of Pride and marriage key words included encourage, as in encouraging people to attend Pride events, and presence or participate. Presence or participate referred to the clergy person being involved or present at Pride events and one's willingness to perform marriage ceremonies.

Therefore, from the voice of the LGBTQ community, in both oral and written form, the chapters to follow will look at the challenges and celebrations in more depth and examine the connection between the challenges and celebration to the Ministry of Listening, the Ministry of Encouragement, the Ministry of Presence/Participation, and the need for referrals.

Important Terms

Before moving on to examining the strategies and their connection to the challenges and celebrations it is important that the writer and the reader are on the same page when it comes to terms and definitions. Therefore below are some frequently used terms and definitions.

- LGBTQ - refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer persons.²⁰
- Queer - a broad term that can include all categories of people whose sexuality or expression of sexuality is non-normative. Sometimes expressed as "genderqueer," which can refer to someone who identifies with traits of both male and female.²¹

²⁰ Kundtz and Schlager, *Ministry among God's Queer Folk*, 13.

²¹ Kundtz and Schlager, 13.

- Sexual identity - refers to that person's internal sense of being a man or a woman.²²
- Gender expression or gender presentation - is the way a person outwardly expresses that internal sense of gender identity.²³ It is a term used to describe the way in which individuals express their sexual desires, either alone or with partners.²⁴
- Lesbian - refers to female persons who are primarily or exclusively attracted to other female persons.²⁵
- Gay / gay men - refers to male persons who are primarily or exclusively attracted to other male persons. Sometimes "gay" is used in a broader way to mean both lesbian and gay or even all LGBTQ people.²⁶
- Bisexual - refers to male or female persons who are attracted to both same-sex and other-sex persons, although not necessarily to the same degree. Sometimes shortened to bi.²⁷
- Transgender - a broad term to include those who disregard the commonly accepted definitions of gender, all or part of the time. Often shortened to "trans."²⁸

²² Kimberly D. Acquaviva, *LGBTQ-Inclusive Hospice and Palliative Care: A Practical Guide to Transforming Professional Practice* (New York, New York: Harrington Park Press, 2017), 25.

²³ Acquaviva, 25.

²⁴ Acquaviva, 32.

²⁵ Kundtz and Schlager, *Ministry among God's Queer Folk*, 13.

²⁶ Kundtz and Schlager, 13.

²⁷ Kundtz and Schlager, 13.

²⁸ Kundtz and Schlager, 13.

- To Come Out/Coming Out (of the closet) means to declare in some public way and to some degree one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.²⁹
- Sexual orientation - refers to a person's innate sense of emotional, romantic, and/or erotic attraction to others (as opposed to "sexual presence," which implies a conscious choice).³⁰
- Sexual behavior - refers to acts engaged in by an individual toward the goal of sexual pleasure, reproduction, or both.³¹
- MCC - refers to the shortened version of the legal names for the denomination: Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. Now referred to as Metropolitan Community Churches.
- ICM - Las Iglesias de la Comunidad Metropolitana. Spanish translation of Metropolitan Community Churches in the Iberoamerica/Caribbean churches.

²⁹ Kundtz and Schlager, 13.

³⁰ Kundtz and Schlager, 13.

³¹ Acquaviva, *LGBTQQ-Inclusive Hospice and Palliative Care*, 32.

Chapter 4 - Challenges: Coming Out, Rejection and Depression

LGBTQ people must deal with some unique challenges that don't have to be dealt with by straight people. And there are more challenges than one can deal with adequately in one project. Therefore I selected three challenges for this project. The challenges are coming out, rejection, and depression. I write from my own experience as a mixed raced, white appearing, married lesbian, clergy person; from the experiences of LGBTQ friends, family members, congregation attendees and members; and the words of many who have used their words to teach about the needs and the pastoral care needed for the LGBTQ people.

Coming Out

Coming out to my parents was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do in my life. By coming out to my parents I am referring to having a face-to-face discussion of my being a lesbian; to confirm personally what had already been in their mind. In coming out to my parents I am referring to just one portion of the process that an LGBTQ person goes through as one becomes "aware of one's homosexuality and coming to integrate

that identification in an affirming way within one's self-definition."³²

The lifelong process has no definable beginning and never ends. The coming out process "constitutes a crisis for the lesbian or gay person, as well as for his or her social network."³³ It is a time of leaving the heterosexual privilege behind and moving into a minority unprivileged environment. There aren't any age specifications for coming out. I've known people who have known since they were three years old that they were gay and I've known people who didn't come out until they were almost 80 years old. At some point in my life and in the lives of many LGBTQ people, we realize that we are different. Many times we don't know why or we don't have the vocabulary to express how we are different. The lack of ability to have adequate vocabulary is common in those who, like me, came from a protected family environment where the words "homosexual" or "gay" were never heard or used. Due to this realization there would follow a time of self-discovery.

This time of self-discovery generally means a time of hard work. It will include learning more about one's self, learning about the LGBTQ community, and negotiating life in a new LGBTQ

³² David Shallenberger, "Companions on a Gay Journey: Issues of Spiritual Counseling and Direction with Gay Men and Lesbian Women," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 50, no. 1 (1996): 89.

³³ Larry Kent Graham, *Discovering Images of God: Narratives of Care Among Lesbians and Gays*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 36.

environment. It could possibly mean dating an opposite sex individual to conform to social norms, experimenting with same-sex sexual interactions and possibly engaging in destructive behaviors as one struggles for self-acceptance and acceptance from others. Throughout this time of self-discovery many emotions will surface. For some there will be anger at self and others for being "different." They will look for someone to blame within their family or be angry at God. Along with anger will be shame, guilt, confusion and fear.

For some the shame and guilt will lead them to turn away from their church due to the church's non-acceptance. Through the preaching of hate by some non-LGBTQ clergypersons, the LGBTQ person will "perceive the church as hateful, discriminatory and closed and feel that there can never be a home for them there."³⁴ It is no wonder that the "process of coming to terms with one's homosexuality in the face of such pervasive societal prejudice is extensive and lengthy. The world has told gay men and lesbians that they are sick, perverted, and sinful for so long that they have come to believe it in a deep and entrenched way."³⁵ Some will fear that others will discover their differentness, their secret, and therefore these folks might spend a great deal of time in the closet striving to keep their life hidden. Being

³⁴ Shallenberger, "Companions on a Gay Journey," 90.

³⁵ Shallenberger, 92.

in the closet is like living two lives. One life that everyone sees as one goes to work or school or church; it is a life that looks "normal" to other people. The other life is the one where someone is dealing with the self-discovery and self-acceptance, and working to integrate their sexual identity into who they are; into an identity of wholeness. Living life in the closet is full of fear and can be for most, destructive. "People who live in the closet can suffer the following: poor self-esteem, loneliness and isolation, eating disorders, alcohol and drug addictions, sexually compulsive behaviors, severe depression and thoughts of suicide, and the inability to build or maintain strong friendship and healthy romantic relationships."³⁶ One of the most difficult and emotionally straining events of living in the closet is to have someone else "out" you. Someone learns your secret and spreads the information to others in your community; whether your community is school, work, play or church. This can have devastating results such as depression or suicide when one feels they cannot deal with the ramifications of being "outed".

For others it seems to be a matter of acknowledging who they are. Many, especially as decades have passed and being LGBTQ is becoming more acceptable, grow up knowing they are gay,

³⁶ Kundtz and Schlager, *Ministry among God's Queer Folk*, 134.

lesbian, bisexual or transgendered and it is a part of their maturing experience.

Again, the self-acceptance of one's sexual orientation into one's overall identity is one part of the coming out process. Another part of the coming out process is to tell others of significance in one's life about one's orientation. This can be a very scary process. And can be especially scary for one who is a teenager and has few resources.

I was terrified to tell my parents when I was in my mid-twenties. I thought they would hate me and not want to have anything to do with me. The topic of homosexuality was never spoken of in my home. At the time I didn't know that there were other people in my extended family who were gay. Needless to say I was quite relieved when my father said, "Tell us something we don't know." My father went on to tell me; your cousin is gay, his uncle was gay and your mother's aunt might be a lesbian.

For some telling their families about one's orientation is definitely not as easy as I had it with my parents. Many LGBTQ people are rejected by their families and friends. Look on the streets of any major city, or under the city bridges or in an alley at night and one would probably find a LGBTQ teenager who has been kicked out of their home and has nowhere to go and no resources to help themselves. For teenagers with caring friends they might find themselves couch surfing (sleeping arrangements)

at different friend's homes as they juggle school, anger, rejection, and trying to figure out how they are going to survive. My congregation is filled with stories of being unwanted and rejected by family and friends and with stories of those who are still dealing with being rejected by significant people in their lives.

While time does help in some cases for family members to come around to acceptance, time doesn't make any difference in the lives of others. My parents were wonderful when I came out. They were accepting and proceeded to come to the Holy Union (a religious commitment service without legal standing) my partner and I had in 1990. Whereas my youngest brother has not spoken to me but a handful of times in 30 years and I am never allowed to meet his three children who are now adults in their mid-twenties. Different levels of acceptance within the same family are possible and are often normal.

Coming out is a never ending process. I have been out for over thirty years, yet every time I meet a new person I have to consider the encounter to possibly be a "coming out" experience. I have to think and evaluate: do I tell this person I am gay? will this person be of such significance in my life that they should know this information? how will they react? will they run from the room screaming in horror or will they be accepting, open and affirming? All these questions and many more run

through my mind instantly when I meet someone for the first time. And the big questions that many have to ask is, is this person safe? Coming out is a continuous process through the life of a LGBTQ person. My experiences are common experiences within the LGBTQ community.

An additional factor in the coming out and telling process is coming out and telling the significant people of one's church. The reaction one receives very much depends upon one's denomination. This is another place where many LGBTQ people of faith find rejection. An LGBTQ person will need to determine, "Is the space or are these people safe? Can these people be trusted not to demean, abuse or discount me in the fullness of my human identity?"³⁷

Here's an example of what an LGBTQ person did to determine the safety and acceptance of a church. More than fifteen years ago a Metropolitan Community Church in Florida was holding a yard sale. Tania, a local lesbian, who had moved into the community, was in the early process of coming out, and who was looking for a church home, heard about the yard sale. She went to the yard sale, not to find some needed or wanted item, but to check out the people and the church. She was looking to see: are these people really LGBTQ? are they really church? would this be a safe place for me to attend? will I see people just like me -

³⁷ Hobbs, "Climate of Care," 36.

young, lesbian and a person of faith. She ended up buying an ugly lamp she did not need. She bought it only so she would have an excuse to go up to the woman who was the cashier to ask her questions about the church. This young lesbian eventually found this church to be her church home. This church welcomed her as she was and embraced all of her gifts. Many years down the road she is now a clergyperson in the MCC fellowship. (This story is still a favorite to tell at church gatherings and is shared with Tania's permission).

Historically churches have not been accepting of LGBTQ persons. My wife and I were thrown out of our childhood Baptist church when someone "outed" us to the new pastor. The new pastor came to our home and told us that if we would not give up our lesbian relationship then we were no longer welcome to come to church. This was traumatic to us. This had been my wife's church home since she was born and I had been attending this church since a teenager (this is the church where we met). The loss of one's place to practice one's faith is devastating. Again, there is hard work involved in finding a trustworthy religious community, "a safe community."³⁸ Thankfully many who have similar experiences have found their way to Metropolitan Community Churches and other open and affirming congregations.

³⁸ Hobbs, 36.

Another part of the process of coming out is living an authentic life, one that is true to who one is in all one's wholeness. At this point in the process an individual has usually integrated their sexual orientation and is learning to live fully into the person they are. One will have to learn the skills and have the resources everyone else has to live one's life: a job to pay the bills, a home that one can consider safe, possibly college or some job training, and possibly a relationship.

Yet living an authentic life as a LGBTQ person means being hyperaware. One might need to do some research on where one would want to live. Besides learning if a potential area has any criminal history one might also need to learn about gay bashing (physically harming an LGBTQ person just because they are LGBTQ) in that particular neighborhood. Before accepting employment, one might want to find out about the practices of the company. Do they offer health insurance to one's same-sex significant other or spouse? Must one be legally married before your significant other can be on the insurance policy? What are the procedures for reporting LGBTQ discrimination? For many states this will not be an issue, yet here in Pennsylvania it is still an issue since a state-wide non-discrimination bill has not been passed. Before finding a place to worship, when one is ready to venture back into that territory, one might want to check out

websites to find out what churches in one's neighborhood are "open and affirming". Open and affirming meaning a church that accepts all people, including LGBTQ, just as they are without changing or trying to fix them. An open and affirming church is a place where all people are welcomed into the life of the church and everyone can participate in all its rites and sacraments from membership to marriage and possibly ordination. Coming out is a hard process that is lifelong. It is risky and complex as one negotiates one's way through new pathways of self and fulfillment. The process is filled with questions especially those related to safety and finding one's new place in one's world.

Rejection

Rejection is a by-product of the coming out process of revealing one's self to others. Rejection is one of the great fears of a LGBTQ person. Fear of rejection is at the heart of why many want to stay in the closet. Rejection means exactly as it sounds; a non-LGBTQ person is told or finds out that their family member or friend is LGBTQ and then they decide that they want nothing to do with the LGBTQ person. An LGBTQ person can be rejected by family, friends, acquaintances, work, school, church, in other words by everyone and everything in one's life.

The rejection can lead to a total break within the family structure.

In all of these cases, rejection will mean someone of importance turning their back on the LGBTQ person. Rejection is especially difficult for "the young who carry the fear of rejection simply because of their youth and their age-appropriate lack of confidence that they could survive without their family's support, understanding, and acceptance. This is not paranoia but a reality-based fear, for indeed parents, siblings, and friends regularly reject LGBTQ people when they come out. In particular, for anyone of any age, rejection based on a core identity can be devastating to one's sense of self, one's way of being in the world, and one's self-confidence."³⁹ Two of the biggest obstacles that teens face when coming out LGBTQ is "parental reaction and peer reaction. Both are compounded by society's attitudes toward homosexuality in general."⁴⁰

A parent learns that their child is LGBTQ and many times their first reaction is to blame themselves or the other parent. The friends their child might hang around with could also be blamed. When parents do not accept their LGBTQ teen the parent will force the teen to leave the house and in essence they are thrown out of their homes to survive on their own. The teenager

³⁹ Kundtz and Schlager, *Ministry among God's Queer Folk*, 87.

⁴⁰ Culbertson, *Caring for God's People*, 201.

who leaves home loses connection with their family and the family support that is needed for maturation and the development of wholeness. The rejection might also include being rejected by siblings who refuse to accept their LGBTQ sibling. A rejected teen might not have resources to help them survive. They don't have resources to care for themselves, funds to pay for needed supplies, and often have no place to go. For many, rejection could mean years of not speaking with or being involved in the lives of siblings, parents and extended family members. It could mean not being included in family activities and celebrations. It could mean not even being able to meet one's extended family as siblings marry and have children of their own.

A friend that the LGBTQ person thought they could trust to be understanding of who they are might reject them and tell them that they never want to have anything to do with them ever again. Coming out might mean being rejected through the loss of employment. Years ago a friend lost his job at a fast food restaurant. He was an award winning manager with the best sales figures in the county. Yet once his boss found out he was gay, he was fired. Unfortunately this was before any passage of non-discrimination bills or before anyone even thought of such a thing.

Rejection could mean the loss of one's living space. I know many transgendered people who fear their landlord finding out

about their change in gender. It is part of the history of LGBTQ folks to lose their apartments when the landlord finds out they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered. This rejection isn't just applied to the individual. In the early years of the Metropolitan Community Churches, the late 1960's and early 1970's, many spaces for worship services were lost once the landlord found out it was a bunch of "queers" meeting for church and the landlord would lock out the church whether they had a lease or not.

Rejection can lead to unsafe living conditions, depression, suicide and risky sexual behavior. "Too many young men and women act out their pain in self-destructive ways. Guilt and secrecy, harmful and frustrating relationships, and unsafe sexual behavior are but a few of the fruits of the church's failure"⁴¹ and the failure of significant people in the lives of a LGBTQ individual to accept those coming out as LGBTQ. Another alarming consequence of not accepting and rejecting a LGBTQ person in their coming out process is the "high teen suicide rate: most studies identify about 30 percent of all teen suicides as being due to the despair that results from struggling with a gay identity in an unsupportive and stigmatizing environment."⁴²

⁴¹ Culbertson, 199.

⁴² Culbertson, 199.

Just as coming out is a lifelong process so too is rejection unless there is reconciliation and acceptance. LGBTQ people live with the concept that being rejected by a significant person in our lives can be lifelong separation.

Depression

I am not a psychiatrist, a psychologist, or a licensed counselor. Yet all I need to do is look at my own congregation, speak to the folks that are attendees and members, or speak to folks in the LGBTQ community, to know that many LGBTQ people are dealing with depression. "Depression is a disease that afflicts one in five Americans. One percent of Americans suffer from bipolar disorder."⁴³ Some of them are dealing with depression due to the coming out process and being rejected. And some are dealing with depression for hundreds of other reasons and circumstances that happen in their lives.

For many persons of faith the first step in getting help for their depression is their pastoral care giver. For the pastoral care giver the first step is to acknowledge that depression is a disease. The individual is not lazy, or moody, they are dealing with a disease that needs treatment. LGBTQ

⁴³ R. Lanny Hunter and Victor L. Hunter, *What Your Doctor & Your Pastor Want You to Know About Depression* (St. Louis, Mo: b Chalice Press, 2004), 5.

folks, like everyone else, will show signs of depression, therefore, it is imperative that pastoral care givers learn the signs of depression. Signs of depression include (this is not an exhaustive list): sad mood, irritability, distorted thinking, low self-esteem, repeated thoughts of death and suicide, agitation, loss of energy, fatigue, change of sleep patterns and physical symptoms like headaches, muscle aches and stomachaches.⁴⁴ LGBTQ folks, like anyone else, will also deal with obsessive-compulsive disorder and bipolar disorder. I have learned these signs of depression and am aware of those in my congregation who deal with depression every day; every minute of every hour of every day of their lives.

I have learned that it is ok for me to approach a church member or attendee who has been identified as one with depression and talk to them about their disease. This has happened through our years of relationship building of pastoral care giver and congregant. When I have seen my congregation member or attendee not "acting" as their usual self I privately approach them and ask, "how are you today?" or depending on who I'm talking to "have you taken your medication today?" If they have taken their medication I might ask "when was the last time you had your medication levels checked?" I also might ask them "when was the last time you have spoken to your therapist?" or

⁴⁴ Kundtz and Schlager, *Ministry among God's Queer Folk*, 97.

"is it time for an appointment with your therapist." This will often lead into a conversation of what is going on in their lives and we take some time to talk and check up on what is happening in their lives emotionally, physically, spiritually and relationally.

One of my congregation members has dealt with depression for many years. She had attempted suicide and has been hospitalized. We talk frequently. She often comes to me when she is upset or confused about what is going on in her own mind. I believe many times she just needs someone to listen to her (the strategy of listening will be discussed in the next chapter) and she wants someone else to confirm that what is going on in her head is something she should talk about with her therapist. Many times she will sit in my office and tell me what is going on in her life. She will express what is troubling her. Often she will end her thoughts with "should I tell my therapist about this?" Sometimes when she does not ask the question, I will suggest that at her next therapy appointment she should talk about this issue with the therapist.

In chapter 2 I wrote about being called to Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute to talk to patients who are asking to speak to a gay pastor. Many of these folks want to speak to someone they recognize as being like themselves. They want to speak to someone who knows what it means to be LGBTQ. They want

to talk to someone who knows first-hand what they are going through with in their lives. In these visits I provide a listening ear, a sounding board, a friendly face, and an invitation to come to church once they are released.

"Occasionally queer folks are labeled as being depressed when really they are frustrated, sad, mad, confused, afraid, and so on. It is often difficult to distinguish clinical depression from simply having too much on one's plate."⁴⁵ Often this frustration and other emotions are a response to coming out and being rejected. It is often difficult to distinguish between those who are frustrated and those who are depressed. This will take a trained professional. Be ready and have handy the name of a professional or two for a referral.

Many clergy are not professionally trained to counsel those who are dealing with depression. What are we to do? The next chapter will deal with this question. The next chapter will describe strategies that LGBTQ people indicated through my surveys that are important to them in struggling with coming out, rejection and depression.

⁴⁵ Kundtz and Schlager, 97.

Chapter 5 - Strategies for the Church and the Pastoral Caregiver

The Church and Its Strategies

So where does the church fit in when it comes to helping and providing care to the LGBTQ person as they are coming out no matter where the individual is in the process, dealing with rejection or suffering from depression. Both the pastoral caregiver and their church must decide their stand beforehand and then "speak clearly and publicly about where they and their congregation stand on including LGBTQ people."⁴⁶

Bernard Schlager gives three basic steps to build a community of care for LGBTQ people. Step one - create a genuine welcome. Step two - integrate queer people into the life of the congregation. Step three - build alliances with queer communities outside the congregation.⁴⁷

A genuine welcome is one in which the congregation has been educated about LGBTQ people and fully welcomes the gifts the LGBTQ person brings to the congregation. The church understands "the spiritual wounds of LGBTQ people and the mistrust that they

⁴⁶ John Hobbs, "Climate of Care: Pastoral Ministry to Gays and Lesbians," *The Christian Century* 125, no. 5 (March 11, 2008): 35.

⁴⁷ David Kundtz and Bernard Sloan Schlager, *Ministry Among God's Queer Folk: LGBTQ Pastoral Care*, The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 161.

have of religious institutions.”⁴⁸ I continue to see signs of this mistrust when people enter my MCC which is 100% LGBTQA (A for allies). I see the look in their eyes that is asking if this is too good to be true. I hear the question, am I really safe here? Can I really be myself? They are still astonished to realize that they don’t have to hide that they are gay or lesbian or bisexual or transgendered.

I still remember the first time I went to a MCC after a bit of time not attending any church. I asked some of the same questions noted above. It was like coming home. I found a place to worship God in all of my true self. I didn’t have to leave part of myself at the door or out in the car. I found wholeness and acceptance by God and other people.

To be welcoming church members have been introduced to and have been taught many of the terms used within the LGBTQ community such as the meaning of LGBTQ. Church attendees and members have been taught how to address a transgendered person and have learned that it is quite appropriate to ask an individual - what pronouns do you prefer I use when addressing you? They have been taught not to ask questions about the details of a person’s transitioning process. “Have you had genital surgery yet?” is not an appropriate question to ask when one meets a transgendered person for the first time and it might

⁴⁸ Hobbs, “Climate of Care,” 34.

be a question that is never asked. And the people of the church have made a "commitment to engage in open and honest conversation with queer people about their lives."⁴⁹ Ask the same questions that one would ask a heterosexual couple or individual; how was your vacation? how are your children, your grandchildren? what are you doing for the holidays? Take an interest in their lives as individuals of the church not just as the LGBTQ member of the church.

Knowing the proper terms to use and learning how to address LGBTQ folks are also an important part of integrating LGBTQ people into the life of the congregation. Integrating LGBTQ people will also mean that the church will need to evaluate everything from their language in their bulletins and publications to the posters on the walls. Some questions that a church might need to ask: do our posters and visual arts only reflect families as one female (mother), one male (father) and children? don't we need posters and other visuals that show families of many configurations like two moms, or two dads or even a single parent with a child? do the written words in our bulletins and the words in our service announcements reflect inclusive language? does our website use language that's inclusive? does our marriage ceremony information refer to husbands and wives or to spouses?

⁴⁹ Kundtz and Schlager, *Ministry among God's Queer Folk*, 162.

Churches that are welcoming and working to integrate LGBTQ people into the life of their congregations will need to look at the events that are celebrated within the church. Congregations will need to determine: how are we going to celebrate LGBTQ Pride?, are we and/or how are we celebrating the anniversary of a same-sex couple?, how will we celebrate the annual "Coming Out" day?, how will we celebrate rituals for those transitioning such as the decision to live authentically through a gender change and/or the selection of a new name. One strategy I have used with a transgendered person who wants to celebrate their transitioning and the selection of their new name has been to re-baptize the individual using their new name. I also provide them a new baptismal certificate in their new name. This is a powerful moment of completion for some individuals and a sign of acceptance by the church. The church will need to determine how they will teach the church about AIDS and how they will participate in recognizing the number of LGBTQ people living with AIDS who might be in their congregations. They will need to decide how to remember those who have died from AIDS and its complications. They will need to determine how to annually recognize World AIDS Day in December.

The church will also have to determine, beforehand, how LGBTQ people will be involved in the worship life of the church. Will they be allowed to participate in the worship service? Will

LGBTQ people have opportunity to be ordained, to lead prayers or Bible study classes? How will the church support one of its LGBTQ members as they work through seminary?

The last step in becoming a congregation of care for one's LGBTQ attendees or members is to build alliances with LGBTQ agencies and organizations. The church will need to learn about and find a way to work with local PFLAG (Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays), or with educational organizations like GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) in their local schools.⁵⁰ Some churches might become a host site for a PFLAG group. The church can make connections through their local LGBTQ Community Center if there is one or help start one especially for the young LGBTQ folks who might not have anywhere else to turn for help. The church can place an advertisement in their local LGBTQ newspaper identifying themselves as an open and affirming house of worship. All of these steps plus the loving heart of the people will form a church that is open and affirming to the LGBTQA community.

Pastoral Care and Listening

The two keywords identified that were most often used in the responses of the surveys and interviews were the words

⁵⁰ Kundtz and Schlager, 174.

"listen" and "hear." All 7 of the clergy interviewed and all 9 clergy who responded to the clergy survey responded with the clergy strategies: to "listen to," to "talk with," or to "hear" what the care receiver was saying. A majority of the lay surveys in which the respondent answered all the questions about coming out, rejection and depression, 73% of the surveys contained the response of "listen," "hear," or "discuss". Therefore, it is important to look at one's ability to listen and to form a Ministry of Listening.

Those who are looking for a pastoral caregiver are looking for those "who possess spiritual wisdom and who serve others with compassion. They search for church leaders who have a deeply anchored spirituality and who can offer pastoral care grounded in a lively relationship with God, led by the Spirit, and prompted by a genuine call to serve. They want someone with whom to share their deepest and most personal experiences. They look for people who can talk naturally and openly about their faith and how it connects with the joys and struggles of daily life. Above all, they seek caring persons who are centered in God, and open to hearing God's voice in the midst of the people."⁵¹ I would add to this that LGBTQ people are looking for pastoral caregivers who will listen and who already know about

⁵¹ Jean Stairs, *Listening for the Soul: Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 108-9.

their culture, needs and challenges as LGBTQ people. The LGBTQ person who is looking for spiritual or pastoral care is not looking to become the teacher for the care giver. They are looking for care not a teaching opportunity.

As I sit at my desk at my keyboard typing I hear in the background the fire station siren go off, I hear the fire trucks as they drive down the road with their siren going, and I hear the vent in the bathroom operating. I'm not really concentrating on their sounds but they are all around me. They are part of the cacophony of sound in my home. Yet I can say that I am not really listening to the sounds. We all hear "stuff" around us all the time. One would probably be amazed at the amount of noise in the air as one tried to find a quiet or silent moment.

Listening is more than hearing sounds. Listening is "choosing to pay close attention to the various sounds that come our way."⁵² It is a choice we make to fully pay attention. As long as one has a functioning ear, one can hear but it takes a conscious effort to listen. While hearing is an "easy, passive process, listening requires energy, motivation and patience."⁵³ There is a great deal to pay attention to while listening. Listening is "an act of intentionality, obedience, intimacy,

⁵² James E Miller, *The Art of Listening in a Healing Way*, 2003, 10.

⁵³ Robert J. Wicks and Thomas E. Rodgerson, *Companions in Hope: The Art of Christian Caring* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 5.

receptivity, hospitality, focus, soul inquiry, and habit.”⁵⁴ It is “the primary task of pastoral caregivers, but it is also the privilege and responsibility of the entire faith community.”⁵⁵ An intentional act of listening requires more than ears.

Intentional listening also requires our eyes and sometimes our nerve receptors. Our eyes can be used to see if actions like facial expressions and movements reinforce what is being said or do the body motions contradict the words being spoken. As a person tells their story we look to see if the body language reflects the events in the story. We look to see if facial expressions reflect sadness as the speaker relates a loss in their life. Our nerve receptors and eyes can pick up on a speaker’s nervousness, uncertainty and confusion. We become aware through our eyes and nerve receptors to a speaker shaking or twitching in anxiousness as they begin a conversation or as the speaker gets to a more difficult part of their story as when there is trauma or abuse. Some listeners even seem to have the ability to sense when a speaker is not being honest in what they are saying; I know my parents could tell when my siblings and I were not being honest.

As we develop relationships with our parishioners we learn of their past, of important events in their lives, and of their

⁵⁴ Stairs, *Listening for the Soul*, 12.

⁵⁵ Stairs, 7.

hardship and their joys. This information is available for us to use as a listener to help us put together what a speaker is telling us now and how we fit it into what we already know of the individual. What we know of our parishioners helps us to understand more fully as we listen.

According to James Miller, a spiritual director and grief counselor with Willowgreen Consulting, there are 6 ways of listening.⁵⁶

1. Casually: one is not really concentrating, paying attention or is unfocused. An example from earlier was my hearing the fire station siren.
2. For comprehension: one is more engaged in listening. One wants to listen to learn, understand, and to grasp information.
3. Critically: one is listening in order to make a judgment or to make a decision. One is listening for information of support for their judgment or decision or to refute a judgment or decision made by another.
4. Appreciatively: One is listening to what brings one pleasure. One hears a favorite song, a musical piece, sounds of nature or the rhythm of poetry.

⁵⁶ Miller, *The Art of Listening in a Healing Way*, 10-14.

5. Therapeutically: one is hearing with the goal to help the one who is speaking. This would be the listening of a counselor or psychiatrist.

6. Healing: one is listening with the goal of hearing more than the words spoken; one is listening in order to be with the speaker. It is listening with the idea of being and not doing.

Healing listening is critical for the pastoral caregiver. For in healing listening one chooses to not just hear the one in need but one chooses to go beyond hearing. We have no agenda in the listening but to be present and listen. This listening is about "letting our ears be awake and attentive to the voices of yearning, weariness, and supplication in the form of words, holy screams for new life, or sighs too deep for words."⁵⁷ Our full attention is on the speaker without wondering how one would "fix" their situation or problem. Healing listening is what will enrich a ministry of listening.

A ministry of listening will require effective listeners.⁵⁸ An effective listener will invite another to share their story; will encourage another to share. A listener will help draw out the story when the speaker seems to stumble, they will not break into the silence but give the speaker space to organize thoughts

⁵⁷ Stairs, *Listening for the Soul*, 15.

⁵⁸ Peter McIntosh, *Listening Is Healing: A Practical Guide for Pastoral Care*. (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2013), 7.

and reflect on their phrasing. Of course, confidentiality is expected in a pastoral caregiver. Listeners will eliminate as much as possible any interruptions or distractions from outside the meeting area. I find it helpful to ask my volunteer receptionist to hold my phone calls until I am done. I also move to a room that is further away from where everyone else is working so there is increased privacy in the conversation.

Listeners will stop and think before making any comments and will be sure that the speaker has truly stopped speaking and not pausing a moment to put together their thoughts. An important action of a listener will be patience, which means giving the speaker time to clarify their own thoughts and time to finish their comments. A listener will understand what is said and what feelings might be behind what is being said.⁵⁹ A listener will identify themes that run through a speakers story and will practice a fine line of knowing what needs to be clarified when the speaker finishes and when to interrupt without causing distress to the speaker. A listener will also monitor their own nonverbal communications.⁶⁰

Think about your own facial expressions or body language when you are engaged in pastoral care. Do your facial expressions indicate that you are carefully listening? Does your

⁵⁹ Wicks and Rodgeron, *Companions in Hope*, 19.

⁶⁰ Wicks and Rodgeron, 28.

face express horror as the speaker tells their story of abuse or express joy as they relate a funny story? Does your facial expression enhance a speaker's desire to continue telling their story or does your expression say to them that you are not a safe person or a caring person to talk to or even a person who is interested in what they have to say? The facial expressions and body language of a listener can be seen by the speaker as an indication of approval, care, disapproval, boredom and many other emotions. How a pastoral care giver demonstrates nonverbal responses is a big factor in the success or failure of a pastoral care encounter.

The pastoral caregiver will "always keep one ear on the storyteller and the other ear open to God's spirit of wisdom and truth."⁶¹ The pastoral caregiver is listening for the spirit to identify places where discernment is needed. They are listening for those areas where follow up questions might be needed or clarification is required. The pastoral caregiver might need to ask questions that go beyond the facts to the feelings. The pastoral caregiver is listening for those moments when one needs to remain silent and for those moments when words are needed.

In asking questions it is important to follow three basic principles as indicated by Wicks and Rodgeron.⁶² The first is to

⁶¹ McIntosh, *Listening Is Healing*, 14.

⁶² Wicks and Rodgeron, *Companions in Hope*, 64-66.

ask as few questions as possible while the individual is speaking. Questions have a tendency to interrupt the flow of the speaker. We have all experienced someone interrupting our conversations and when they are done we usually say to ourselves or them, what was I saying? The second principle is to make your questions short, clear and to the point. Keep the question related to what is being said. Use the question to keep the conversation moving forward. The third principle is to decide what kind of question is most appropriate to use in a given situation. One could use a closed question in which one is asking a question that usually requires a yes or no answer or a minimum of clarifying details. I once had a parishioner who was relating a story to me and I realized that I wasn't sure if the event was a current happening in their life or something from the past. I needed to interrupt with the short question, "when was this happening?" This made all the difference to relating the story to what I already knew of this individual. The other kind of question one might have to ask is the open question. This type of question will usually require a much longer answer. It might also take the conversation in a completely different direction. This might happen when the listener has picked up a bit of the story that needs to be expounded upon or maybe the listener has heard some feelings being expressed that are being

overlooked or glossed over. The listener returns to those under-expressed thoughts after the speaker finishes.

A pastoral caregiver who is an effective listener will also provide a safe space for the speaker. A space where the individual feels that others outside the conversation cannot hear them; where words, feelings and reactions can be expressed without fear; and where no condemnation is present. I often use the conference room to meet with parishioners. The Associate Pastor's office is right next to mine and the receptionist sits right outside our offices. Everything we say in our offices can be heard by anyone in the receptionist area. At times when moving to the conference room is not possible I put on some music that helps block our words from being heard outside my office. There are also times when I meet with folks at the local diner or coffee shop to talk if the topic of the conversation will not cause distress to the speaker. The major concern for location is the comfort of the parishioner and their ability to feel safe in speaking.

The pastoral caregiver will need to provide a space that does not have a time constraint on it. Such as, if the pastoral caregiver knows that the choir is coming in for rehearsals in 30 minutes, then the rehearsal area would not be a good place to start a conversation required in a ministry of listening. The space will also be free of as many distractions as possible;

turn off one's cell phone, ask the speaker to turn off or mute their phone, shut down one's computer, ask the receptionist to take messages for returning phone calls and possibly put a "in meeting" sign on the door.

When it comes to time, the pastoral caregiver needs to discern the amount of time to be used in the conversation. The listener would have to discern whether the speaker is talking to hear themselves or are they talking to share deep feelings and concerns. The listener would discern whether or not the speaker is becoming repetitious and how to move the interaction forward. A pastoral caregiver will need to be cautious. "So often we can't stand to hear deep or difficult stories. We rush in to speak: to tell our competing tale or, in the role of religious expert, to offer help or advice."⁶³ The pastoral caregiver must carefully discern when it is time to listen or when it is time to be more proactive. The pastoral care giver is not present to share their story, but to listen to the story and needs of the parishioner.

An effective listener will follow some basic "dos" and "don'ts". The pastoral caregiver listener will hold the encounter in prayer. They will pray before the meeting if possible for discernment, wisdom, protection, and the movement

⁶³ Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 142.

of the Holy Spirit in the meeting. One should have tissues available. One will let tears flow and silence reign as needed. One will provide a place that is relaxing and words of calmness. The speaker might need to take a couple of deep breaths before they are ready to speak. Look at the speaker, make eye contact, and watch their body movements.

While it might be helpful to have one's Bible available, don't thumb through it as the other speaks - it is distracting and the speaker might wonder if you are truly listening. One should not put words in the mouth of the speaker. If there is silence let it be until they find their own words.⁶⁴ Don't let a misunderstood phrase, word or concept go unquestioned. As the listener, if you don't understand what the speaker is saying ask for clarification. It is better to interrupt than be wondering the rest of the time what the speaker meant or what an unknown word or expression means to them. The clarification of the unknown might give a completely different point to the story. This is most important in intergenerational conversations. Each generation seems to come up with new phrases and expressions that have one meaning to them and might have a different meaning to the previous generation or no meaning at all. I hate to admit it since it is an indication of my age, but there are many times when I have to ask my own young adults at church what the

⁶⁴ McIntosh, *Listening Is Healing*, 20-23.

meaning is for an expression they are using or one that I encounter on a social media site. While they find it funny that I don't understand or know the meaning they are always willing to educate me. I find my asking also lets them know that I am willing to learn from them and listen to what they have to teach and say.

For the non-therapeutically trained care giver some of the hardest conversations are with those who are dealing with depression. One responsibility of the listener is to determine or identify the problem and determine if the problem is something that can be dealt with non-therapeutically or if a referral is needed.⁶⁵ The pastoral care giver should be aware of signs that an individual is dealing with depression. Listen as the individual speaks to his or her feelings and emotions. Listen to hear if his or her emotions have turned to a negative self-concept. As the speaker talks listen for clues that his or her behavior has changed, maybe he or she are no longer engaging in some of one's favorite activities. One of my parishioners stopped sewing as her depression increased. As she worked with a therapist I saw her interest in sewing return. Listen for clues about changes in eating habits, whether it is indicated by eating more or less. Listen for a change in sleep.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See chapter 6 for information on referrals

⁶⁶ Wicks and Rodgeron, *Companions in Hope*, 102.

When listening to an individual who might be dealing with depression listen to clues about changes in physiology. Often depression is accompanied by physical pain or a change in pain level. It is appropriate to ask if the individual has seen a doctor. Also be aware of a change in thought patterns. Does the individual seem to be having difficulty remembering or in making decisions. Most important are they saying anything about suicide. Always take the talk of suicide seriously. Fifteen percent of the people who talk about suicide end up committing suicide.⁶⁷ Be mindful that it is difficult to sometimes distinguish between someone who is a bit down or who might have the "blues" and someone who is displaying clinical depression. Be prepared to refer the individual to a professionally licensed therapist as needed. In all that is done when we are listening, one of the most important things to remember especially with someone who is depressed is to be a patient listener!

As pastoral care givers we are representatives of God. We listen also with our ear of faith. We listen with a faith that says that God is in the conversation. A faith that says God is in control of the situation. As we listen to the speaker we are also listening for the voice of God to direct and guide us. We listen for the voice of God in our discernment of the situation.

⁶⁷ Wicks and Rodgeron, 103.

"Listening in faith is done with awareness that God is going to show up."⁶⁸

Being a pastoral care listener requires that we know ourselves and the barriers that keep us from being good, effective listeners. We need to be aware of what is happening in our own lives and how that is impacting our ability to listen to another. We must be aware of when our own stuff is keeping us from being an effective listener. We need to be aware of our own "attitudes in matters of race, class, gender, culture, age, religion, language, sexual orientation, level of education, marital status, disabilities, gender roles, political affiliation and so on."⁶⁹ This means we need to know ourselves. As stated in an earlier chapter if one's belief system causes one to look negatively on LGBTQ people, then it is best for the pastoral care giver to refer to someone whose belief system enables them to be accepting of LGBTQ people.

A pastoral care giver must be aware of how their theology impacts their ability to hear another whose theology is completely different. A care giver must be aware of how one's own hurts, wounds, prejudices, impressions, and/or expectations impact their ability to listen and determine if one is placing one's own stuff onto the one needing care.

⁶⁸ Emma J. Justes, *Hearing Beyond the Words: How to Become a Listening Pastor* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 98.

⁶⁹ Justes, 25.

"Everyone has some issues that we would prefer to avoid."⁷⁰ Avoiding hearing another's story of a particular issue might be an indication of unfinished or unresolved shame, guilt, fear, rage, grief, or loss on the part of the listener and will need to be dealt with to become a more effective listener of others. Any of these issues in our lives along with conflict and criticism limit our ability to listen.⁷¹

The pastoral caregiver who desires to be an effective listener would need to be one who is firm in their faith, one who is mature in their beliefs and most importantly one who is "willing to develop the necessary gifts and skills needed"⁷² for a ministry of listening.

Making Effective Referrals

Throughout this project I have written that a pastoral caregiver should refer an individual to licensed professionals as the circumstances arise or are warranted. Therefore, it is appropriate for me to spend a little time writing about referring and providing information on who one can use with referrals.

⁷⁰ Justes, 31.

⁷¹ Justes, 34.

⁷² McIntosh, *Listening Is Healing*, 19.

"A wise referral is one of the most significant services a pastor can render a suffering parishioner."⁷³ A wise referral means that the pastoral care giver has evaluated a situation and realizes that professional help is needed for their parishioner and their situation is more than the pastoral care giver can handle alone. The pastoral care giver will "need to recognize when one's efforts - listening, support, helping with goals, helping in problem solving is not enough."⁷⁴ The pastoral care giver is not losing the contact or their responsibility to their parishioner after the referral. The pastoral care giver is still the pastor to the individual who now seeks professional help. A wise referral indicated that the pastoral care giver is not in denial of their limitations and that one's own efforts might not be enough.

Clinebell gives 10 recommendations as to who should be referred:⁷⁵

1. Those who can be helped more effectively by someone else.
2. Those with problems for which effective specialized agencies are available in the community.
3. Those who do not begin to use pastoral help in four or five sessions.
4. Those whose needs obviously surpass the minister's time and/or training.

⁷³ Howard John Clinebell and Bridget Clare McKeever, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth*, Updated and rev. / Bridget Clare McKeever (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 310.

⁷⁴ Robert J. Wicks and Thomas E. Rodgerson, *Companions in Hope: The Art of Christian Caring* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 162.

⁷⁵ Clinebell and McKeever, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 311-12.

5. Those with severe chronic financial needs. Public welfare agencies with trained social workers are appropriate referrals.
6. Those who need medical care and/or institutionalization.
7. Those who need intensive psychotherapy.
8. Those about the nature of whose problem one is in doubt.
9. Those who are severely depressed and/or suicidal.
10. Those toward whom the minister has a strong negative reaction or intense sexual attraction.

In determining that an individual needs to seek professional therapeutic help, the pastoral care giver should take time to discuss this with the one seeking help. The pastoral care giver might need to explain that the situation will require more expertise than they possess or will require more sessions of care than time available by a pastoral care giver. It might be that they are not the right person to talk with such as when a care giver's beliefs are opposed to accepting LGBTQ people.

A huge part of the referral process is knowing where to refer an individual for help. It is important when a pastoral care giver enters a new parish that they spend time gathering community resources and building relationships with social agencies, helping professionals and other pastoral colleagues of the community.

I have been in south central Pennsylvania, in the city of Harrisburg for almost seven years. I have spent the entire time I have been here gathering referral information. I got this

information from many sources. This includes word of mouth, making phone calls and meeting many people.

When a member or attendee of my congregation has included me in their care by letting me know they are seeing a therapist I have asked them about the therapist. I have asked whether or not they would recommend their therapist to other LGBTQ people. I have asked therapists within my own congregation if I can use them as referrals.

I have gotten information from our local gay newspaper, *the Central Voice*. I have gotten information from the "Official Pride Guide" and "The LGBTQ Guide" which are published by *the Central Voice*. I have collected business cards from professionals that I have encountered in my interactions in the community. I have gotten information for the Central Pennsylvania Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce and from the various hospitals in south central PA. I have tapped every means available to find individuals and agencies that I can use as referrals for my congregation.

Knowing the importance of referrals I have included in this chapter many of the individuals and agencies that I keep handy for referring. This is not an exhaustive list. Also, this list is centered around Harrisburg, PA and extends into south central PA. I encourage you to gather your list of referring individuals and agencies.

Chapter 6 - Celebrating Marriage and Pride and Pastoral Care Strategies

Marriage Celebration

On June 26, 2015 there was great joy throughout the land for most people, especially many of the LGBTQA community. The United States Supreme Court ruled that state bans on same-sex marriage are unconstitutional in the case of Obergefell v. Hodges. This ruling stated that to deny a marriage license to a same-sex couple or refuse to recognize a marriage performed in another location violates the Due Process and the Equal Protection clauses of the 14th Amendment of the U. S. Constitution.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania legally recognized same-sex marriages on May 20, 2014 when the U. S. Federal District Court ruled that the Commonwealth's 1996 ban on recognizing same-sex marriage was unconstitutional.⁷⁶ Currently in Pennsylvania a LGBTQ person can get married to a same-sex individual one day and then be fired the next day when their employer finds out about the wedding and is not in favor of

⁷⁶ The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has not yet enacted a Non-discrimination bill for the protection of LGBTQQ persons from being fired from their employment, discrimination in obtaining a mortgage, loss of services in libraries, hospitals and hotels, and loss of living facilities due to who they are.

same-sex marriage. Therefore, it is most important that we, pastoral care givers, celebrate same-sex marriages. A pastoral care giver should be prepared to counsel and perform same-sex weddings.

As with any issue for a pastoral care giver, if one's belief system is not in favor of working with same-sex couples then the care giver should refer the couple to another pastoral care giver whose belief system enables them to perform a wedding service for a same-sex couple. It is quite important for a couple to find a pastor who is lovingly willing to perform one's service. I have traveled more than a hour from Harrisburg, PA to perform wedding services due to the lack of clergy in more conservative areas willing to perform the service and folks want a pastor to do their service and not a justice of the peace. A common response in the surveys received from LGBTQ lay people indicated that an important role for their pastor in care giving was for that pastor to counsel them before the wedding and for that pastor to perform the service.

I have been performing commitment services since 2004. During my clergy years in Florida and in Pennsylvania prior to May 20, 2014, I performed Holy Unions. A Holy Union is a religious commitment service without any legal rights. The Holy Union is in all appearances just like a legal marriage without the marriage license. When the law was enacted here in

Pennsylvania in 2014 I performed my first legal LGBTQ wedding within 2 days. Many of the first LGBTQ couples I married were those who had been in relationship for decades and were just waiting until the law was changed here. They didn't want to leave Pennsylvania to get married.

Many of these first weddings were attended by the couple and me⁷⁷. These weddings were quickly put together with little ceremony and did not require a great deal of pre-counseling. They were mostly older members of my own congregation who had been together for what seemed like forever. One lesbian couple had been together for 41 years before their wedding. Also many of the couples who were together for decades were more concerned with the legalities that went along with marriage.

I remember when my mother got remarried to my step-father in early 2014 before the Pennsylvania law was changed. We had a conversation about the rights she obtained in her marriage at the moment she signed the paperwork after saying "I do" that my partner and I did not have even though we had been together for almost 29 years. She didn't realize that my partner and I had to complete a great deal of legal paperwork to safeguard ourselves and our finances to give us some of the same rights she automatically got when she married.

⁷⁷ Pennsylvania does not require witnesses to sign the marriage license.

Many of the early LGBTQ marriages I performed were concerned with inheritance, medical, insurance, and housing issues. Part of our marriage celebration was a celebration of obtaining all the rights that married couples have from Internal Revenue Service tax filing advantages to hospital visitation. We also celebrated the ability to have our names changes after we married.

Through the last four years the amount and type of celebrations have changed. Couples, especially the younger couples, who come to me for weddings are no longer centered on the legal rights but on the ceremony itself. Most couples no longer seem to be in as much of a hurry as they were in 2014 and 2015. Couples are taking a lot longer to plan their wedding service and reception. Couples are looking for a more intensive celebration with lots of people present and a party.

As with anyone getting married there is a time of pre-wedding counseling. This is an expectation of my congregation members and attendees. Questions are asked about their relationship and information is gathered on their expectations of the wedding ceremony.⁷⁸

Pre-wedding counseling should be the work of any pastoral care giver. The questions asked of same-sex couples are quite similar to those asked of an opposite-sex couple. The most

⁷⁸ My list of questions can be found at the end of the chapter.

important question I ask, especially of those who are not part of my parish is; "why do you want a pastor to perform the service? why not go to the courthouse and get married?" This gives me an opportunity to learn about them, their faith background and it gives me an opportunity to invite them to come to church, although I do not make church attendance a requirement for performing their wedding service.

I ask questions on the methods of dealing with disagreements, their sexual relationship, their health relationship⁷⁹, how they deal with living together, their family dynamics and the possibility of adding children to the relationship and all the other usual questions a pastoral care giver asks a couple who is intending to marry.

I find it important to ask about the openness of the wedding. What I mean by this is how many of their family members know about the wedding. I ask if family will be attending the service, participating in the service, and is the family supportive of the wedding. I ask if there are children involved in the relationship and will they be involved in the service. Often when children are involved we include within the service a time for a prayer of blessing for the united family.

⁷⁹ Health questions are asked due to HIV/AIDS.

After all the usual questions we discuss the actual wedding ceremony. I have a number of printed service samples⁸⁰ that I give to the couple to review. I ask them to see if there is anything in my samples that might interest them with the notation that nothing is in stone. I tell them they can pick and choose parts of different services and put them together to make a completely different service. They can use any of my samples just the way they are written. The couple I last married wrote the entire wedding service themselves. They included everything from prayers to vows (I did get to make some changes).

One of the most important things I can do as a pastoral care giver for a couple getting married is to remind them that the service needs to reflect them, who they are, and what they mean to each other. I'm present to help them share their day with each other and their family and friends.

It is important to make a big deal of our marriages and celebrate them within our church. When my partner and I got married we had our service right after our Sunday morning worship service. Everyone, members, attendees and visitors, who were in church that morning were invited to the wedding. One of my faithfully engaged members was a visitor the day of our wedding. She shared during her membership class that one of the reasons she wanted to become part of MCC-Spirit was because of

⁸⁰ Three wedding service samples are included at the end of the chapter

the welcome she received and the invitation to stay for the wedding.

Pride Celebrations

When most people hear about LGBTQ Pride the first thing that goes through their mind is a rainbow flag, a Pride Parade or maybe a Pride festival. These are part of the public Pride celebrations but there is so much more especially from a faith point of view.

June is traditionally known nationally as LGBTQ Pride Month, yet Pride is celebrated at different times of year depending on location. In the Palm Beach Country area of Florida on the east coast Pride is celebrated in March. This is a "cooler" time of year after all the winter holidays, but before the summer heat and hurricane season. In Sarasota County on the west coast of Florida Pride is celebrated in September or October. This is after the summer heat but before the winter holidays. In south central Pennsylvania, Pride is celebrated the last weekend of July. Other cities in Pennsylvania have celebrations usually between the beginning of June and the end of August. They are spread throughout the summer so folks can attend multiple Pride festivals.

Pride celebrations usually include a parade through some part of town that ends at the festive site, a festival with vendor booths and entertainment, and after hour parties at LGBTQ bars and drinking establishments. In Harrisburg we also have a Pride "Voices United" concert which includes songs from various music groups such as the Harrisburg Gay Men's Chorus, Voices of Spirit from MCC of the Spirit, The Central PA Womyn's Chorus and other musical and vocal entertainers. We also have an Interfaith Pride Service known as "Spirits United" where many faiths come together to celebrate LGBTQ Pride.

The pastoral care giver must be mindful that Pride is not just a one day or one month celebration. Pride is a daily event that should be incorporated into preaching and teaching opportunities the same as when one includes teaching on stewardship or outreach discipleship. Pride celebrating should be integrated into the church teachings as a method to combat the years of discrimination. The pastoral care giver will need to deal with years of ingrained hatred by those in the church and those outside the church upon the LGBTQ community.

I am cognizant that as a pastoral care giver I need to help my members and attendees overcome the stigma of being called an abomination in the eyes of God or an unwanted people. Pastoral care givers need to preach and teach to overcome the message that God can't love a LGBTQ person because of who they are. I

and other pastoral care givers need to be preaching and teaching that God loves all people no matter their sexual orientation and we should be proud of who God has created us to be.

When I first came out 30 plus years ago, my youngest brother came to my home with his bible (he was attending a Baptist seminary) and beat me up with scripture. I was new to my own self-identification as a lesbian and I had no idea how to combat his biblical attack. I made a promise to myself that I would never let anyone do that to me again. Therefore, I have spent the last 30 years studying what are referred to as the "Texts of Terror." The Texts of Terror are scriptures from the Hebrew/Christian Bible that are used to condemn homosexuality. These scriptures include the story of Sodom and Gomorrah found in Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22, Deuteronomy 22:5, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10. These six passages have been misinterpreted to condemn homosexuality and to say that God does not approve of anyone being homosexual. While this topic is far too extensive to include in this project, all pastoral care givers who minister to the LGBTQ community should familiarize themselves with these passages and the research and commentaries that have been published in the last ten to fifteen years.

Part of my celebrating Pride throughout the year is the opportunities I make to teach about these texts and what the

Bible does and doesn't say about homosexuality. Along with including these teachings I also look for opportunities when I can incorporate into my preaching and teaching lessons about characters from the Bible who we might consider to be the other. I teach about eunuchs, the relationship between David and Jonathan, and the relationship between Naomi and Ruth. I raise questions about who these people are and could their relationships be homosexual in origin. Pastoral care givers need to familiarize themselves with these Texts of Terror and these characters and how they might relate to the LGBTQ community.

Strategies for Celebrating

In my interviews with clergy and the surveys from lay people regarding marriage and Pride, two key words kept appearing. The first word was "encourage" or "encouragement" and the second was "presence". Clergy felt it was important to encourage their members and attendees. This encouragement meant to help their LGBTQ members and attendees to celebrate fully the Rite of Marriage and to celebrate who they are with Pride. I am dealing with encouragement and presence in the same chapter since they are so closely related. Our presence is often an encouragement to our members and attendees. And when we encourage others we must be present in that moment so that our

words are not empty. I often think of the adage many have used with various tweaks - I use "I wouldn't ask my church folks to do something around the church or in the community that I wouldn't be willing to do." When I think about encouraging someone to do something like attend a Pride event, how sincere is my encouragement if I refuse to also be present physically at the same event.

In chapter 5 I dealt with the Ministry of Listening. A component of listening that wasn't discussed until now is a Ministry of Presence. An effective listening pastoral caregiver must also be present; they must be in the moment. The ability to be present or a ministry of presence is important to our church members and attendees and they quickly know if we are not really present mentally. It is not just of physical presence that is looked for but also our mental or emotional presence.

I taught middle school science for many years and my students were quite good at knowing when I was really listening to them. I think they taught me a great deal about listening. They helped me know the difference between hearing them and listening to them. They knew whether or not I was really present in the conversation or when I was half listening and giving them lip service with a few grunts thrown into the conversation. You've probably seen the glazed-eyed look that someone has when they are not really listening but just appear to listen.

The Ministry of Presence

Presence is basically an indication of "being there."⁸¹ The ministry of presence "is fundamentally a gift of the self."⁸² Being present might mean putting a hand on another's shoulder or giving a hug if the pastoral caregiver discerns that it is appropriate. Sometimes presence might mean to invite the individual into one's office and taking the moment to shut down the computer and close the door to give someone your undivided attention. Presence means to be receptive of another into one's space; into one's personal center. Presence might also mean to sit quietly while another person figures out how to say what they want to say while you, the listener remain silent.

Presence means to be physically present at the activities that are important to the LGBTQ members and attendees of one's church. This means more than worship services. One's presence might mean attending a member's graduation party or new home celebration. Presence might mean attending the funeral of a member or attendee's extended family even if the family member didn't attend one's church.

⁸¹ Neil Pembroke, *The Art of Listening: Dialogue, Shame, and Pastoral Care* (London; New York: Grand Rapids, Mich: T&T Clark/Handsel Press; William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2002), 1.

⁸² Pembroke, 13.

Presence also means being available. I know that there are many opinions on how much information the congregation should have for reaching a pastor. Everyone who attends or are members of my congregation have the availability to my phone number. Emergencies happen at all times of the day and night and for me it is important that my parishioners can get ahold of me. When they call we determine together whether or not they need me physically present with them or if they can handle the situation and keep me posted. Yet it is important to also have boundaries. If someone takes advantage of have my contact information I deal with the issue with the individual.

At this year's Pride festive after our booth was set up I did the unusual. While I am not a big poster of my location on Facebook, I posted on Facebook that our booth was all set up and ready for folks to come by and visit and that I would be there all day. I wrote that I hoped to see many folks at the park. Around lunch time one of my attendees who had moved further away geographically from the church came to the festival. She stopped at the booth and shared with me her story of what brought her to the festival. She said she wasn't planning on coming to the festival this year. It was too far away and she was so tired from being her mother's care giver. Then she saw my Facebook posting. She told me that if I hadn't posted and written I would

be at the booth she wouldn't have come. This was both the ministry of encouragement and the ministry of presence.

Ministry of Encouragement

A Ministry of Encouragement is the ministry of "leading and supporting others."⁸³ To encourage is to help someone see their own gifts. It means to give support, confidence and/or hope to someone else. To encourage someone means to help them develop themselves and their own solutions and to stimulate them to move forward. It means helping someone into their boots but letting them lace them up themselves and move out. Encouragement means means to put courage into or onto or to make it in someone else. An encourager is "someone who puts courage into you or on you or who helps something to develop or increase and to grow in you."⁸⁴

"Verbal encouragement includes the idea of one person joining someone else on a journey and speaking words that encourage the traveler to keep pressing on despite obstacles and fatigue."⁸⁵ Encouraging another should be a partnership. Encouraging another does not mean we do the work for them but we are present with them as they engage in what needs to be done.

⁸³ Paul Moots, *Becoming Barnabas: The Ministry of Encouragement* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004), 2.

⁸⁴ Vincent Paul N, *The Ministry of Encouragement!: How to Become an Encouragement to Others!*, 2014, 53.

⁸⁵ Larry Crabb, Dan B Allender, and Larry Crabb, *Encouragement: The Unexpected Power of Building Others Up*, 2013, 20.

"To encourage people is to help them gain courage they might not otherwise possess - courage to face the day, to do what's right, to take risks, to make a difference."⁸⁶ Words of encouragement can lift a spirit, give new hope, move an individual to self-examine their situation, give renewed confidence, and bring one closer to God.

A pastoral care giver will become an agent of encouragement when they have developed confidence in themselves and their calling. An agent of encouragement will have positive perspectives on life events and issues. Also the pastoral care giver who is acting as an agent of encouragement will have a faith in God, in God's promises and believe in these promises.⁸⁷

As with listening, there are a number of characteristics of encouragement that will enable us to fulfill this ministry as pastoral care givers. First we must see beyond the problem in the one we are trying to encourage. We must know who we are encouraging to know how to encourage them. It is the pastoral care givers function to help the one needing encouragement not to get weighted down by their situation. We are a source of strength and must help them visualize beyond the current situation. Pastoral care givers help others see a way around obstacles. "The effect of encouragement is to stimulate the hope

⁸⁶ John C. Maxwell, *Encouragement Changes Everything: Bless and Be Blessed* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 9.

⁸⁷ Paul, *The Ministry of Encouragement!*, 46-48.

that solutions exist for every problem and that, seen from an eternal perspective, life does make sense.”⁸⁸

Another characteristic of encouragement is that we encourage by eliminating blame in the situation. Look at the problem, look beyond the problem to possible solutions and ignore who is to blame. Blame will bog one down in a swamp of indecision. Searching for blame will be used to keep from having to deal with the situation or problem.

The third characteristic of encouragement is to dare to encourage one to look at the problem clearly; confront it face to face. Don't try to make it look pretty. A problem is a problem and all the glitter one can throw at it won't change the situation. Encouragement means we as, a pastoral care giver, refuse to it give up.⁸⁹ We will not allow another's defeatism to be our defeat. Yet it should be noted that referring an individual for the care they need is not giving up. For a pastoral care giver is still the individual's pastor even when they are under the services of a licensed therapist or care giver.

Pastoral care givers must have the characteristic of strength. Being an encourager is not an easy task. It requires one to know one's self. At times it will mean that we will need

⁸⁸ Crabb, Allender, and Crabb, *Encouragement*, 96.

⁸⁹ Paul, *The Ministry of Encouragement!*, 19-24.

to examine ourselves and acknowledge our own feelings to ourselves and God but not to the one we are trying to encourage. As pastoral care givers we must be totally committed to the work of encouragement as an instrument of God. A pastoral care give must be spirit led and God centered. Pastoral care givers must be prepared for all kinds of reactions from those they are encouraging for not all will be willing to accept the words or actions of encouragement and some will become overwhelmed by the interaction. The work of the pastoral care giver must be motivated by God's love and one's acceptance of all people.

"Encouragement changes everything! By encouraging others and creating an atmosphere of encouragement for the people around us, we have the power to improve the lives of others."⁹⁰ Most important in all that we as pastoral care givers do to encourage others is to have all of our encouragement surrounded by love. We use our own love for our parishioners and we bring to them the love of God.

⁹⁰ Maxwell, *Encouragement Changes Everything*, 124.

Chapter 7 - Analysis of Conclusion and Application to Ministry

This project affirmed the importance in hearing the voice of the LGBTQ community. It highlighted specific areas of need and reflected the community's opinion on pastoral care needs and strategies. This project answered my question of what does the LGBTQ community say is important to them in regards to the care they receive from their pastors when it comes to challenges of coming out, rejection and depression. It also answered what is important to the LGBTQ community when it comes to celebrating marriage and Pride.

This project highlights areas that might need to be improved in a pastor's pastoral care ministry in ministering to and with members of the LGBTQ community. This project can be applied to anyone's ministry whether they have been ministering to the LGBT community for years or are beginning the journey of professional ministry or are still in the educational phase toward ministry.

This project gives recommendations that can enhance one's ministry in the areas of listening, encouraging and being a presence. It also provides information on the LGBTQ community that one probably will not have unless they are a member of the community.

A conclusion that I make from this project is that the skill of listening or ministry of listening needs to be added to the Masters of Divinity program instead of waiting until one gets to the doctorate program at Lancaster Theological Seminary. Through the doctoral program and this project my estimation of the importance of listening has grown exponentially.

Appendices

Resources for Marriage:⁹¹

Pre-counseling Questionnaire

Wedding Service Samples

⁹¹ You have my permission to use or adapt this form and the wedding services as they will serve your ministry.

MCC OF THE SPIRIT
PRE-MARITAL/PRE-HOLY UNION QUESTIONNAIRE

Relationship History:

1. How long have you known each other?
2. How long have you been dating each other?
3. How did you first meet?
4. Have you and your partner ever lived together? If so, for how long?
5. Have either of you made other commitments to each other, such as a holy union, marriage, or domestic partnerships?
6. Have either of you ever been married or had a holy union before? If yes, was there a divorce or a dissolution?
7. Are there any difficulties in your relationship that make you reluctant to get married? If yes, please describe.
8. Has your relationship been under any unusual stress during the last year? If yes, please describe.

Your understanding of Marriage/Holy Union

1. Why do you want to get married/have a holy union?
2. What do you expect your relationship to be like after your marriage/holy union? I expect ...
3. Does your family know of your plans?
4. What do you believe your role in this relationship is?
5. What do you believe your partners role in this relationship is?

Communication

1. How do you handle/discuss any of the following topics?
 - a. Expectations
 - b. Communication
 - c. Goals for self, partner and relationship
 - d. Roles/Responsibilities in the relationship
 - e. Finances
 - f. Sex
 - g. Needs

2. Do any of these topics cause stress or tension in the relationship?
3. Who does the majority of talking when you are alone together?
4. How do you communicate anger to one another?
5. How do you behave when you are angry?
6. How do you communicate what bothers you?
7. How do you express love or affection to one another?
8. Do you fight fair?

Sex

1. Do you know any reason why you are unable to have a healthy sex life?
2. Are you sexually active with each other?
3. What are your views on pre-marital sexual relations?
4. Do you know if you are both healthy?
5. Have you both been tested for HIV or STDs?
6. Do you have fears of sexual intimacy?
7. Have you discussed sex with each other?
8. What are your views on monogamy and open relationships?

Spiritual Inventory

1. Why do you want a service involving MCC?
2. Do you attend any religious services?
3. What are your current religious and spiritual beliefs and practices?
4. How do your religious and spiritual beliefs and practices affect your relationship with your partner?

Children

1. Are there children involved in this relationship?
2. Do they know of the upcoming service?
3. How do they feel about the upcoming service?
4. Will they be involved?

Other Information

1. What questions or concerns do you have regarding the issues covered?
About marriage/holy unions in general?

Contemporary Vows - Sample #1

Pastor: In the presence of God, the hosts, those beings we believe in but cannot always see, I pronounce these names:

_____ and _____. We come together in this place to join hands and in so doing, to make a pair of souls into a third, for the glory of God, for the good of our fellow human beings for the needs of these two people. When we walk away, these people will be as they were when they came, equal in every way yet different because they will be equal parts of each other.

Couple [unison]: We desire to stay together, work together under the parenthood of our God.

Pastor: That is as it should be.

Couple [unison]: We desire to be together as long as we can bring each other love, friendship, companionship and help.

Pastor: That is as it should be.

Person on right to person on left: My mind is clean, my body is clean and I offer them to you before God and before my friends assembled here.

Person on left to person on right: My mind is clean, my body is clean and I offer them to you before God and before my friends assembled here.

Pastor: That is as it should be, and in the time to come you will bring each other love as yet not known to you both and that knowledge of yourselves that you do not yet know. This is a uniting, not a contract. This is a union with no set of rules but those you set upon

yourselves. God gave God's children minds so that they might think. God gave you, God's children, consciences, so that you will always think with temperance. Only through mutual respect and love will this union live and thrive.

Couple [unison]: We have come together to stay together.

Pastor: It will be, so long as you want it to be, so, and if you should stop wanting or caring then you should be part. Not as a thief going in the night. Not in anger or in harshness but with sensibility and respect. God did not mean for us to live alone, nor did he wish us to live together without caring and without respect.

Couple [unison]: We have a need for one another.

Pastor, to person on the right: This is the Holy Sacrament done in the presence of God. For me to join two lives together you must believe that your need is genuine and transcends all.

Person on right: I believe that to be so.

Pastor, to person on the left: This is the Holy Sacrament done in the presence of God. For me to join two lives together you must believe that your need is genuine and transcends all.

Person on left: I believe that to be so.

Pastor: This is a covenant with the Almighty - whatever you believe the Almighty to be.

Couple [unison]: We believe that by leaning on each other we will hold each other up.

Pastor: This is a vow forever. If forever should end for the two of you, or one of you tomorrow or next year, stay together only as long as you need each other. Go only when your need for the other ends.

Person to right: I believe in love. I believe the person I will walk away with today to start another lifetime with to be someone I wish to comfort and I will expect comfort in return. I will share whatever I have to share, and I will always expect the sharing and the loving to be returned.

Pastor: It is good that people come together.

Person on left: I believe in the power of love. The power of goodness. I assert, and I believe that coming together with this person broadens my own capacity of love; I will obey my love, not because I am told to but because it is my desire to share all that I have with this chosen one. I will work as we have pledged to work together, for ourselves, and more, for each other.

Pastor: It is good. You are part of the family of humanity and one with that spirit about and around us.

Couple [unison]: Bless us. Pray for us and sanction our union. Help us to remember that we are separate but we are equal.

Pastor: I bless you. The Holy Spirit blesses you. What you believe to be God blesses you and believes you.

Person on left to person on right: I trust you. You honor me by letting me begin with you this new life. I give my life to you, in God's name.

Person on right to person on left: I give my life to you in God's name because I trust you, because you honor me by letting me begin with you this new life.

Best man, lady in waiting, friend (holder of the rings or garlands, etc.): These rings (garland, etc.) are but a symbol.

Couple [unison]: A symbol of a perfect day and the start of a perfect life.

Pastor: God of heavens, Lord of the universe, divine being that makes us creatures - whoever you are, wherever you are - join with me and bless this union. Let them rise to those heights only love can guarantee and assure.

Couple [unison]: We love and we desire to be together for today and for always.

Pastor: From this hour onward you are together. You are together for all of us here who see you and those not present.

Couple: (Present rings, garlands, flowers, etc. and/or join hands.)

Pastor: Each human being is in God's eye equal. Before you were two, now you are one, more, you are three, because being one your love has given birth and increased your capacity in every way. I pray that you will stay together forever. It is my desire that forever lasts until the final, not always just, hand of death separates you, and that you will be joined again in the world beyond. I love you as you love each other and yourselves. I say that you are joined, that you are united.

Those gathered: Amen

Couple: kiss

Holy Matrimony Ceremony - Sample #2

Gathering

We are gathered here today because love has found _____
and _____ and has brought them together to join in Holy
Matrimony.

_____ and _____ would like to thank
everyone present for sharing this special day with them.

Dearly beloved, we gather here today in the sight of God to join
_____ and _____ in Holy Matrimony. This
marriage is not to be entered into lightly, but reverently, and in the
fear of God. If there be anyone present who can show just cause why
these two souls should not be joined together, let them speak now or
forever hold their peace.

Opening Prayer: Loving God, we give thanks for the reason that has
gathered us together and for the heartwarming love that
_____ and _____ have on this day chosen
to consecrate their vows of union/marriage. For their open hearts and
loving spirits, for their wisdom in choosing to love, for the
willingness to walk together in the path of true love, with all its
joys and burdens. Bless them now, so that the words they speak, the
feelings that transform them in the beautiful moments, and the dreams
that they dare to dream can be lived out as a couple. Amen.

The Challenge: Most merciful God, as you look down upon your children
this day, be generous with _____ and
_____ so that in the unfolding veils of time, they may
truly stand for one another as emblems of the incarnation of your

love. Give them a sense of joy, excitement, possibility and challenge about that what they are undertaking: the continuous act of refining their spirits in the presence of each other's witness, of becoming bearers of your love.

Knowing that this is often a difficult act, we ask that you will give them peace of heart and strength of spirit so they honor the vows they make here today. And may the promises they make inspire each of us who celebrate with them today.

Exchange of vows: [to each person individually]

_____, please repeat after me.

In the name of God,

I _____ take you, _____

to be my beloved (husband/wife/partner for life).

To have and to hold,

to honor and treasure.

To be at your side

in sorrow and in joy,

to love and to cherish.

I promise you this with all my heart,

from the depths of my soul,

for all the days of my life.

Reflections on love and unity/marriage: (can vary as one may wish or for seasons):

Love... What a small word for an emotion so powerful that it has altered the course of history. Love is a wondrous thing, good in every way. For it is love alone that lightens our burdens and smooths over all that is rough. For it carries a burden without being a burden, and makes every bitter thing sweet. Nothing is stronger than love, nothing

happier, nothing more fulfilling, and nothing greater in heaven or on earth. For love itself is born of God.

[at advent - this love is quite evident at this time of advent as we anticipate the coming of Christ and celebrate the love of God toward us in giving of the only Son.]

We are gathered here to celebrate a union/marriage, a spiritual uniting that embodies love's most profound possibilities. Therefore, as you enter into this union, you must remember that it is a process of transformation and because of it you too will change.

This is a spiritual process because it deals not only with superficial aspects, but with the deepest essence of your being and you will learn to be kinder, gentler, and more trusting souls.

For it is love, unconditional love, that shatters all limitations and dissolves all fears. This unconditional love is the true gift of unity and will see you through any suffering along its path, and deliver you to the joy of life. We welcome _____ and _____ to the spiritual undertaking of unity/marriage.

Blessing of Rings: The rings exchanged in Holy Union/Matrimony are an outward and visible symbol of the inward and spiritual relationship. They signify to all people the uniting of a couple in holy covenant. May I have the rings in the palm of my hand.

Prayer: Bless, O God, the giving and receiving of these rings, that they who wear them may abide in your peace and live in your grace. O God, each time they see these rings, let them remember the love they have for each other and give thanks to you for that love. Amen.

Exchange of Rings: Let the seamless circle of these rings become the symbol of your endless love you have for one another. [to each individual]

_____ place the ring on _____ finger and repeat after me, weighing each word carefully.

_____ I give you this ring, as a symbol of my steadfast love, and as a pledge to love you, with all that I am, and all that I shall become.

As these rings symbolize your union as one, may their meaning truly be imparted on your hearts and bring you even closer by devotion and faithfulness to one another.

Pronouncement:

And now that you have spoken these words and performed the rites which unite your lives, I do hereby, by the authority vested in me under the laws of the State of _____ and through the Metropolitan Community Churches, declare you, _____ and you, _____ to be (husband & wife/partners for life/legally married wives/husbands) in the eyes of God and of all people.

I now pronounce you married and you may kiss.

And now I present for the first time in public, _____ and _____ (husband & wife/ united couple/legally married wives/husbands).

Charge to the congregation

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God to witness and celebrate the joining of _____ and _____ in Holy Matrimony. This is a special moment in the development of their love. Through their love for one another, their lives have become richer and fuller and they are both made stronger. Having found one another and established their relationship, they have come here to sanctify it and give it special significance by celebrating it here with you in this holy place.

As _____ and _____ proclaim their love and commitment before us their family and friends, let us make our commitment to be loving and supportive of them. Let us ask God's blessing on them and offer to them our blessings, too.

Statement of Intent

To the children: Who brings these women to be married?

The Apostle Paul wrote:

If I speak with the tongues of humans and angels but have not love, I am but a sounding gong or a tinkling cymbal. Love is patient and is kind. It does not envy; it is not proud. Love is not rude, it is not selfish, it is not easily angered. Love keeps no record of wrongs. It does not rejoice in evil but delights only in the truth. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. Now abide faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is love.

_____and _____, you have heard the Bible's definition of love. It is a high and lofty one, but the only one worthy of our efforts. I invite you now to state publicly your resolution to live out this kind of love.

_____and _____, will you endeavor with all that is within you to be faithful to this ideal of love? Will you love and forgive as freely and unconditionally as God loves and forgives you? Will you forsake all others and love faithfully so long as you both shall live?

If so, say "I will" [repeat]

Exchange of Vows

Since you have both stated your intentions to live together in love, and you have heard the love you profess defined by the scripture; I invite you to turn and before God and these witnesses make your vows to one another.

_____take _____'s hand and repeat this vow to her after me:

I _____/_____, take you _____/_____, to be my wedded wife. I will cherish our friendship and love today, tomorrow and forever. I will trust you and honor you. I will love you faithfully through the best and the worst, through the difficult and the easy. Whatever may come I will always be there. As I have given you my hand to hold, so I give you my life to keep. So help me God. [Repeat]

Exchange of rings

For many years now, rings have served as symbols of a loving relationship. Now _____and _____ come to exchange rings. As often

as you see these rings upon your fingers, may you remember the vows you made today and may you renew your determination to make your love last and your relationship grow.

Let us pray: Bless, O Lord, these rings as they are given and as they are worn, they may serve to remind us that though we may fail, love never does. As the circle of these rings knows no end, so may the love this day declared never end, Amen.

Ring Vow

_____/_____ repeat after me: With this ring, I encircle you with my love. I present it as a symbol of my constant faith and abiding love. With this ring I pledge my love to you and give you my heart.

The Pronouncement

In as much as _____ and _____ have presented themselves here and publicly exchanged vows and rings as the symbols of their relationship: by the power that is vested in me by MCCS and by the power of their love I do proclaim that they are wedded wives, in the name of God, the Parent, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

You may kiss.

Benediction

Will you stand, please for the benediction. "Bless us now, O God, as we go our separate ways, that the miracle of love which we have celebrated and witnessed shall ever more inspire us to be loving people. Amen.

Resources for Makes Referrals

ADVOCACY :

Equality Pennsylvania
202 State Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101
717-319-5210
info@EqualityPA.org
www.equalitypa.org

Pennsylvania Youth Congress
413 Walnut Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101
717-743-1035
info@payouthcongress.org
http://payouthcongress.org

ATTORNEYS :

Elizabeth P. Mullaugh
100 Pine Street
P. O. Box 1166
Harrisburg, PA 17108
717-237-5243
emullaugh@mw.com

Rachel Thiessen
5006 Lenker Street
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050
717-730-0737
Rachel@ThiessenLaw.com
www.thiessenlaw.com

BUSINESS :

Central PA Gay and Lesbian
Chamber of Commerce
3211 North Front St, Suite 201,
Harrisburg, PA
Mail: P. O. Box 135
Harrisburg, PA 17108
info@cpglcc.org
cpglcc.org

the Central Voice
Press and Journal Publications,
Inc
20 South Union St
Middletown, PA 17057
717-944-4628
info@presandjournal.com
Editor: Frank Pizzolli
posops@aol.com

CHURCHES/RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS :

Dover United Church of Christ
45 W Canal Street
Dover, PA 17315
717-292-3743
pastor@doverducc.org

Jewish Federation of Greater
Harrisburg
Jennifer Ross - CEO
3301 North Front Street
Harrisburg, PA 17110
717-236-9555 x.33104
j.ross@jewishfedhbg.org
www.jewishharrisburg.org

Market Square Presbyterian
Church
20 South 2nd Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101
717-257-1270
sheets@marketsquarechurch.org
marketsquarechurch.org

Metropolitan Community Church
(MCC) of the Spirit
2973 Jefferson Street
Harrisburg, PA 17110
717-236-7387
info@mccofthespirit.org
www.mccofthespirit.org

Oasis Ministries for Spiritual
Development
419 Deerfield Rd
Camp Hill, PA 17011
717-737-8222
oasismin@oasismin.org
www.oasismin.org

Parish of Saint Joseph of the
Old Catholic Church
4640 Linglestown Road
Harrisburg, PA 17112
717-439-4769
Stjosephocc@gmail.com
theparishofstjoseph.org

Temple Beth Shalom
913 Allendale Road
P. O. Box 346
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055
717-697-2662
tbshalom@gmail.com
tbshalom.org

Vision of Hope MCC
130 E Main Street
Mountville, PA 17554
717-285-9070
info@visionofhopemcc.com
www.visionofhoplemcc.com

FUNERAL SERVICES:

Hetrick-Bitner Funeral Home
3125 Walnut Street
Harrisburg, PA 17109
717-545-3774
cory@bitnercares.com
hetrickbitnerfuneralhomes.com

Jesse H. Geigle Funeral Home
2100 Linglestown Road
Harrisburg, PA 17110
717-652-7701
geiglefuneralhome.com

Neill Funeral Home

3401 Market Street
Camp Hill, PA 17011
717-737-8726
kevin.shillabeer@Dignitymemorial
.com

Ronald C. L. Smith Funeral Home
325 North High Street
Duncannon, PA 17020
717-834-4515
ronsmithfuneralhome.com

HEALTH/HIV/AIDS SERVICES:

Alder Health Services
100 North Cameron Street
2nd Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101
717-233-7190
info@alderhealth.org
alderhealth.org

Hamilton Health Center
110 South 17th Street
Harrisburg PA 17104
717-230-3949
hamiltonhealthcenter.com

PinnacleHealth REACCH Program
717-782-2750
pinnaclehealth.org

PRIMARY CARE:

Alder Health Services (see
above)

Kline Health Center
717-782-2100
pinnaclehealth.org

SUPPORT SERVICES :

Alder Health Service (see above)

AA Group "A Vision for You"
717-234-5390

Common Sense
(adoption and foster care
services)
3001 Market Street
Camp Hill, PA 17011
717-412-0772
www.commonsenseadoption.org

Domestic Violence Services
Hotline: 717-299-1249
P. O. Box 359
Lancaster, PA 17608
www.dvslanc.org

LGBTQ Center of Central PA
1306 N. 3rd Street
Harrisburg, PA 17102
717-920-9534
info@centralpaLGBTQcenter.org
www.centralpaLGBTQcenter.org

Face-2-Face Ministries
Mental Health Outreach Center
717-454-3223 (face)
face2ministries@gmail.com
www.face2face-ministries.org

National Domestic Violence
Hotline
1-800-799-7233

PFLAG Central PA
pflagcenpa@yahoo.com
pflagcentralpa.blogspot.com

TransCentral PA
Meetings: 2973 Jefferson St
Harrisburg, PA 17110
717-831-8142
info@transcentralpa.org
www.transcentralpa.org

TOPS PA 1673
(Take off Pounds Sensibly)
2973 Jefferson Street
Harrisburg, PA 17110
tops1673@gmail.com

THERAPISTS :

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daraliceboles@gmail.com

Delyara Mamedova, MSW, LSW
Franklin Family Services
816 Belvedere Street
Carlisle, PA 17013
717-243-6500
delyaramamedova@gmail.com
Outpatient therapist

Jessica Myers-Adams LCSW
3540 North Progress Avenue
Suite 207
Harrisburg, PA 17110
717-887-8699
Jessica.myeradams@gmail.com
www.myers-adams.com
individual and couples therapist

Susan L. Thornsley MD
717-710-3646
Psychotherapy and Medication
Management

WEDDING RESOURCES :

Approach Photography
Emily Woodford
717-856-3854
ewoodford@gmail.com
www.facebook.com/approachphotography

Battlefield Bed and Breakfast
2264 Emmitsburg Road
Gettysburg, PA 17325
717-334-9904
gettysburgbattlefield.com

J.C. Snyder Florist
2900 Greenwood Street
Harrisburg, PA 17111
717-564-5700
www.jcsnyderflorist.net

Little's Catering
Mark A. Little
6300 Blain Road
Loysville, PA 17047
717-789-4270
goodfood@littlecafe.cojm
www.littlescafe.com

Mountain Laurel Catering &
Events
717-364-0782
sarah@mountainlaurelcatering.com
mountainlaurelcatering.com

Simply Sara's Photography
Sara Justiniano
717-576-6827
simplysaraphoto@gmail.com
www.simplysaraphotography.com

Two Gals Catering
Robin Schriner
1020 Orange Street
Steelton, PA 17113
717-623-0574
twogalcatering@verizon.net
www.twogalcatering.net

William "Tony" Bruner
Disc Jockey
717-379-917

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