

By inference, then, the homosexual is crooked. But I'm not "crooked," so I don't like that term!

JERI: OK, back to your suggestions.

REV. DELORES: I would also suggest that the person look at where they are spiritually, where they are sexually, and where they are intellectually — and then get involved in reading materials that stimulate where they need to be.

There is a lot of reading material around, magazines, too.

But mainly I would say to people, do not shy away from the Scriptures. Our weak point in our community, for us and for people who support us, is the Bible. We shy away from it.

We say to the world, "I can intellectualize with you, and forget the Bible, because that was written too long ago, or we don't have to accept it as the full truth, or whatever."

That is why Jerry Falwell has such a grip on our consciences. But the Scripture is what we need to deal with that guilt. We need to know what the Scriptures really say.

One thing we will be doing at MCC is offering workshops — and other programs — that will help the community deal with this issue.

The Bible is not something we can ignore. It keeps coming up. I'd like to see the community able to deal with it, and not run away from it. Many of us are running, and we don't have to do that.

JERI: What about the future? Will there come a day when it will seem foolish to people that they once could not accept homosexuals?

REV. DELORES: I don't know. There are still so many people who are not willing to accept Blacks or women or Asians or whoever . . .

I think that we just happen to have been popped into a world where there's always going to be a need to hate someone. There will always be a group of people with the need to deny someone rights. I don't believe that we will be over these types of oppressions until the second coming of Christ.

In the meantime, we can limit the ignorance. We do that the way we have done it in the black community — by confronting people who are racist or sexist or homophobic. We will confront them, and we will confront our families.

It is going to start at home. For some reason, for gay and lesbian people, even when they are no longer living at home, they can't start it at home.

But we need to start there. If we can start where people know us best, then I think it can be minimized in the community.

Actually, it needs to start with our accepting ourselves. White people had a hard time figuring out why Black people had to say, "I'm Black and I'm beautiful." Once that can be figured out, maybe the gay and lesbian community can figure out why we need to say it, too.

We need to deal with self-acceptance, and then challenge our families and our friends to accept and to be a part of our lives — completely. Then we just stretch out from there.

When I came out to my family and friends, I did so by contacting every one of them within about a month to a month and a half. I told them that I am a lesbian, and I gave them a week or so to talk.

"This person knows and that person," I would say. "Now you can talk with each other and get back to me if you have any questions." It was just that, almost clinical.

Once they worked it through and got back to me, they all said, "Well, you know, we love you. We accept you for who you are."

And then I let them know the rest of it. Then I had to say to them, "That is not enough."

I had to say, "I know you love me. I already

knew that. I figured that with all the things we've been through, you weren't going to tell me that you no longer loved me — not and mean it. I've loved you through a whole lot of bad stuff; you can truly love me through this good stuff.

"But now you need to take on my issues.

"You need to go to the voting booth, knowing that you have someone that you love very much who is a lesbian.

"You need to deal with it in school, when your teachers or your children's teachers are confronting this issue of homosexuality.

"I expect you to go right out in front of this fight with me. If you can't do that, I don't need your love . . . because it's not going to keep me free."

That's what we need to do. And when enough of us do that, you won't find so many gay and lesbian people looking for a "cure."

That is the cure: to have the people that you love and respect support you, and to let them know that if they can't, then God will send others who can.

JERI: What would you say is the difference between your family and families that don't seem to be able to handle it?

REV. DELORES: My family wasn't given a choice.

I think the difference was that I did not walk in to my family and act all embarrassed and shame-faced, and say, "Oh, dear, I've got this terrible problem. I'm a lesbian, and I don't know if you're going to love me any more, and I'm having a hard time about it all."

I walked in saying, "Look. I want to share something wonderful with you. I like women. I love women. And I'm going to spend my life being sexually involved and being spiritually involved with women. I just wanted to share that with you, and share my excitement that I've found out who I am, and I'm accepting it. You're going to have to accept it, too."

And that was when I told them the part about having a week to make up their minds. And I meant it.

JERI: So you didn't let yourself be put on the defensive?

REV. DELORES: No. I had lived 25 years on the defensive. That was enough. The thing that I was the angriest about was that I should have done it before then.

I don't think my family is any different. My family has a variety of educational backgrounds; they have a variety of economic backgrounds; a variety of experiences like any other family. The only difference is that I'm not afraid to say to them, "Deal with me."

I know it sounds very hard-nosed, the way I went about it, but the reason that I was hard-nosed is that it became an issue of life and death for me.

I could not continue to live a whole, happy, full life, breathing in and out, if I weren't willing to risk. And so I took the risk.

It could real easy. It sounds like it was not a painful decision for me. But it was. It tore my guts up inside to think that I had to say that to my mother.

But I think there comes a time in our lives where if we want to live, we have to risk. I took that risk. And I challenge other people to risk.

JERI: If you had to summarize the difference between someone like you and someone like Gary Brockett, how would you state that difference?

REV. DELORES: We lead two different lives. He has his needs, and I have mine. He has his strengths and his weaknesses and I have mine. He's where he feels he needs to be. I'm where I have to be.

I wish him luck. I wish him Godspeed.

If he feels like he has been cured from homosexuality, then I feel like I have been cured into it.

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