



Practical Guide for Pastoral Care

By Revd Bev Cameron

Preparation

Venue – Find a venue for pastoral conversation that will help set the person at ease

Resources – have available resources such as supportive lay and ordained contact details, the list of Open and Affirming Congregations, list of supportive and social groups such as PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and GLCS (Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service), other hand outs such as Coming Out Alive, UN Rainbow Series and details of UN membership.

Greeting and Introduction

Briefly introduce yourself and why you are a pastoral carer for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, their partners, families and friends.

Note the person's relevant details (ie name, contact number). Ask how they heard about you. This may yield helpful background information.

Exploring the issues

Explore their feelings about being in discussion with you such as embarrassment or anxiety about talking with a stranger.

Explore the nature of the presenting issue. That is, what actually motivated the person to make contact now rather than at another time. There are often

two levels of concern, the presenting issue and historical issues. If you listen carefully, the first will often point to the second. That may give you more clues as to what is really required.

While noting the relevant facts, remain aware of the emotional context. Go carefully if the issue seems very sensitive. Explorations are usually more helpful if not too direct and not too quick, especially if the person is upset.

Exploring support options

Local connections – provide contact details of a support person, open and affirming congregation, social or support groups or an introduction to an appropriate local minister.

Ongoing care – More complex issues such as painful family or other relationships, bad experiences with the church, crises of faith, may be better aided with the help of a minister or experienced lay person if you feel unable to assist in these areas. Referral to professional counselling or medical assistance may be required.

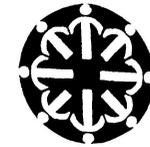
Family and friends – again have different issues. For example, they may need ongoing support in regard to their relationships with wider family, local church members or with the LGBTI person her or himself.

Closure

Close the meeting with some sort of reference to the love of Christ for all people. Assure the person of your ongoing interest and concern and offer further meetings. A short prayer may be appreciated

“A place at the table...” Luke 13:29

Pastoral Care with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people



Uniting Network NSW/ACT

*Working for safety and equality for
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Purpose of this brochure

By Warren Talbot

The purpose of this brochure is to provide a short overview of some of the special issues relating to pastoral care with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people in the Church plus a practical guide. It is in no way intended to replace professional training and counselling.

It is now overwhelmingly recognised by professional bodies representing mental health professionals, such as psychologists and psychiatrists, that homosexuality is not a mental illness to be treated, but for some people a normal part of human development.

What is pastoral care?

Pastoral care is understood in the broadest sense as the authentic engagement with another person, offering support and care as mutual partners on a journey. It involves being with the other person, but has nothing to do with assuming responsibility to change the other person. Often the carer will experience her or his own changes in the process.

What are the special pastoral considerations?

In one sense pastoral care with LGBTI people should have the same features as with any individual, couple or family. But there is a range of particular issues for LGBTI people in church and society, which the pastoral care partner needs to be aware of. There are many resources available, and some of the following points are adapted from one

valuable resource¹. Many of these points are also relevant to family members who wish to support a daughter, son, sister, brother or parent who is LGBTI.

Note that although LGBTI people as a “group” may face similar issues, individually they are different. All combinations of issues are not discussed here, except to note that transgender and intersex people may face a range of medical and clinical issues and require considerable expertise over an extended period of time.

The love of self is fundamental to all human and spiritual growth. In the case of LGBTI people this will be impacted by:

- prejudice, discrimination and even violence
- deeply based shame, guilt and self-hate
- anger against the Church, God and family
- secrecy and isolation of a double life.

The love of each other is one way in which we express our integrity as human beings. For LGBTI this is seen most vividly in the life long journey described as “coming out”. Coming out is the most distinctive experience for LGBTI people. It is an individual matter, and individual choice must always be respected². Some questions the LGBTI individual or same gender couple will face at different times during life will include:

- when, how, and who to tell about this fundamental part of our lives. This must be continually addressed over time

- meeting other LGBTI people
- joining LGBTI community activities
- forming friendships and relationships
- conflicting values in the LGBTI communities.

The love of God-in-Christ, however understood, is important for LGBTI people (and everyone else). Many LGBTI have been rejected by the Church to an extent which can be described as religious abuse. This is a particularly difficult issue, even when some love of self and others is attained. Areas to be aware of include:

- images and concepts of God
- understanding of the Scriptures, particularly the small number of verses which are taken by some to condemn homosexuality
- rituals for LGBTI people, particularly blessing relationships
- appropriate visibility in local congregations.

One particularly dangerous phrase used by Christians who consider themselves to be loving and caring is “love the sinner, hate the sin”. Of course, ethical standards of behaviour are just as important for LGBTI people as others. LGBTI people will invariably receive that statement as a rejection of themselves, as it is often linked to an attempt to impose celibacy or heterosexual marriage on all people.

¹ Evelyn and James Whitehead, *Seasons of Strength: New Visions for Adult Christian Maturing*, New York, Doubleday 1986, chap 4, “Passages in Homosexual Holiness”.

² Cass, V. C., *Journal of Homosexuality, Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model*, 1979, 4(3), pp 219-235.

