
INTERVIEW

PASTORING THE FAR SIDE MAKING A PLACE FOR BELIEVING HOMOSEXUALS

A conversation with Stan Roberts

Former bishop of the San Francisco Single Adult Ward

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FIRST, DO WE NEED SINGLE ADULT WARDS?

When I was a high councilman assigned to singles I struggled with the bishops to give attention to singles. If a bishop wasn't committed to the need to service the singles, he wouldn't call two people to serve on the stake single adult council because it wasn't a priority. He was preoccupied with other things such as Young Women and Young Men programs. I have no fault with that, except that as a pastor he should be concerned about everybody in his ward.

I was a single adult bishop less than one year, and was really enthusiastic about my new ward family, when suddenly I got a threat to disband the ward. My two counselors and I really did some soul searching about the value of single adult wards. All three of us felt that the best thing that could happen to the whole Church would be for its members to become sensitive to individuals, regardless of their marital status, their color, their economic background, or their cultural background. I think that sometimes we put up barriers by saying this is going to be a cultural ward, like Tongan, Samoan, Chinese, or Philippine. Sometimes when we put up a barrier it becomes a long-term barrier, even though the idea is to bless the lives of those people in that culture for the short term. The same thing is true with singles. Yet, unless the Church as a whole is willing to bring singles into the

mainstream of the Church in a married ward then certainly they're better off in a single adult ward.

In order to not have single adult wards, bishops need to feel that there's value in the lives of single people—that they can make a contribution. The first criteria in extending a calling should not be that they have to be married.

We had a woman who was a street person who, according to her, had two attempted rapes in her life. She's had a pistol pulled on her and fired at her. If we're willing to baptize her then we need to pastor her needs. And that means to get her off the street and that costs money. It was interesting to see the resources and the cross-section of people that were willing to give. The people who were just getting off the street themselves were as willing to give as the people who were the most wealthy in our ward, not only funds but time and energy and effort. The scars of the street really stay with people a long time. We have people who because of drug abuse will never be normal, and they're treated with great love. They're tough to deal with but they're loved. I don't think a regular ward would tolerate them or have the time to attend to them.

I've known single women who were asked by their bishop in a married ward not to talk to so-and-so because his wife was threatened. If there's anything going on in that relationship, the bishop ought to bring both of them in and say, "Knock off whatever you're doing."

But what if the man is a Sunday School president and this is a teacher and they're talking about Sunday School and all he says is, "Well how are you doing in your work." If that's not allowed then that makes it hard because then we've separated the single person from the body of that ward. I don't know how you overcome those things. But that sensitivity needs to be addressed in the Church.

On the other hand, in single adult wards singles miss a lot by being separated from other age groups. They don't have the opportunity of being around little children and being exposed to the problems of adolescents. They're not exposed on a regular basis to healthy marriages. They don't have the opportunity of seeing how the infirmities of old age overtake people and how that's an okay experience. The single woman who gets set in her mind on waiting for the perfect man needs to visit teach a mother with a bunch of young children and a house that's not perfect. A lot of single people live in a perfect order and when they start courting somebody, unless that person is in perfect order, they don't nurture the relationship. That's a tragedy. So, I think, living around that whole spectrum of family life is healthy. It's not absolutely necessary but all other things being equal if singles have the opportunity to serve and be a part of family wards then it would be healthy to disband single adult wards.

HOW HAS YOUR VIEW OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP CHANGED SINCE YOU BECAME A SINGLE ADULT BISHOP.

I had been on the San Francisco Stake High Council for about eight years and for the whole time my assignment was advisor to the young adults and then to the single adult ward when it was organized. Then when the Church closed down the institute program at the College of San Mateo they asked me if I would teach an institute class in conjunction with my duties as a high councilman. So when I finally became bishop I had some familiarity with young adults but I was not aware of the dynamics of the ward even though I was there at least once a month and taught institute. But I wasn't a judge in Israel I didn't deal with any of the personal problems. Looking back, when the stake president set me apart as bishop, one of the most significant things he said was that if I would prayerfully listen to the people's problems I would find solutions.

As a result of the kind of people who move to San Francisco there is a wide cross section

of people in the ward, including homosexuals. We not only have business people, blue collar workers, and people who own their own business, but there is a great variety of cultural backgrounds. And everyone brings cultural baggage with them to church. I began to understand that sometimes we let culture get in the way of the gospel. It doesn't matter that you're from the Philippines; but if you bring that culture in and it interferes with the teachings of the Savior, then it does matter. It's hard to push the culture back and let the gospel come to the forefront. That was an interesting challenge.

As a bishop because I would have empathy for a person's cultural needs and would try to administer to those needs and all of a sudden the Spirit would say, "Hey, this doesn't have anything to do with the gospel, you're spinning your wheels, teach the correct principles of the gospel and let him deal with his culture." That discovery was a very subtle thing, it didn't come all at once, but initially I felt a lot of energy going out that was not really producing any kind of a result as far as gospel standards in that person's life.

DID THE DIVERSITY AND TOLERANCE OF LIFESTYLES IN YOUR WARD MAKE IT EASIER TO EMBRACE THE GAY COMMUNITY?

Initially, I didn't think too much about the stake president's counsel to prayerfully listen because I hadn't yet listened. But as soon as I started listening and started relating what I heard from homosexuals with what I read in some books by the Brethren I thought that isn't what I am hearing. For example, I was reading about the dominant-mother/passive-father families but I was hearing different things from these children and, on occasion, their parents. I didn't say, "Well, the Brethren are wrong," because I really believe in sustaining a living prophet. So I started to search what the living prophet had said while he was the living prophet about some issues, and I felt okay about what I read there. As I started to study the issues, I concluded that sexual behavior is very vital to the Church and to God. The Savior and Heavenly Father set us up in families so that children will come into loving and caring homes where they can be nurtured and strengthened. Unfortunately, that doesn't happen all of the time. Some children don't get a lot of care because their parents are not experts in the areas in which their children have needs. How do you deal with these children who are now grown?

As a Church administrator in this unique ward I felt that I was cut off a little bit from the administrators of the gospel who are over me. My stake president was very supportive. When we'd have a bishops' meeting he and the other bishops would say, "Oh, Bishop Roberts, you have a tough job." But they didn't understand why it was a tough job. The challenges and actual issues were not discussed.

Once, the stake president asked me to speak to the bishops and the high council. It was an interesting experience because I was born and raised here and I knew most of the men fairly well. I stood up and addressed issues that two years before I had had no experience with. But as a pastor to a congregation that was dealing with homosexuality, I had to deal with it if I was going stay in that calling. I told them about the cross section of my ward. I told them that 22 percent of my active priesthood were homosexual men. I asked them, "What do we do with people who are homosexual in the Church?" One person said, "They ought to kick them out of the Church." And I said, "Well, that's an alternative. Some of the gay people I've talked to say the same thing. You're right on with how some of the people in the gay community feel—that they'd be better off out of the Church." I let them just think about that and then I asked, "But what do you do with a fourteen-year-old-girl? Do you want to kick her out of the Church? Or a twelve-year-old-boy? What do you want me to tell him? Do you really want to kick them out of the Church?" Of course they didn't. So I suggested to them that we would better serve the gay members when they're twelve so that when they're twenty-eight they'll have some self worth and feel that God loves them. "Because I believe that God does love them," I said. "It's easy to love a twelve-year-old and it's easy for me to love a eighteen-year-old, a twenty-eight-year-old, or one over thirty." I tried to get across that Heavenly Father loves all of us even though he doesn't like some of our behavior patterns. All of us need to change our behavior. That meeting was a good experience; it brought understanding. I don't think I changed anybody, but I think in the future when they deal with somebody who is an adult homosexual they might think, I wonder what the Church is doing to kids like this. What would this kid's life be like if somebody would have dealt lovingly with him when he was twelve?

Initially, dealing with this issue really made me feel uncomfortable, but because of my setting apart I was willing to take the risk. My

stake president really became supportive of what was going on. The scriptures are clear about sexual indiscretions: there's no place in the Church where a man and a woman can go out and have sexual relationships and not have to go through the process of repentance. The same is true for two women or two men. But it's the same law and repentance works exactly the same way in each of those incidents. When I was a bishop before, it was the requirement to hold a court if a person committed adultery or fornication or was involved with homosexuality. In 1985, the Church changed its stance on courts (of course, they changed again recently). If somebody comes in with a broken heart and a contrite spirit and says, I've done this and my heart is broken, and then they are exposed to a court and kicked out, where's the motivation for them to confess their sins? Now the bishop has the discretion to forgive them for the Church and have them go and work it out between themselves and God, or he can put them on informal or formal probation or they can be disfellowshipped or excommunicated. But it's the bishop's discretion, and it allows for the influence of the Holy Ghost instead of simply opening a handbook and saying, "this is what I do. . . ." Until the change, confession had become a very impersonal experience and people were hurt and driven away. And ten years later that person may have three or four children who may never know about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I think it's far more important to be a pastor than be an administrator because pastoring is really what touches people's lives. We need to be trained to be better pastors. It's interesting, if you have a pastoring problem it takes a long time to get help. But if there's a mistake on your tithing report you get faster reaction. We need immediate reactions on pastoring people, too.

DID YOU GIVE SEXUALLY ACTIVE HOMOSEXUALS CALLINGS?

Not to my knowledge. Of course, I could have been deceived. But I got to know them fairly well. If somebody had a lover or they were sleeping with somebody I didn't give them a calling. I think in the eyes of many in the Church anybody who says that they are homosexual is an "active homosexual"—sexually—but that's not the case. I had homosexuals who were active members of the Church who were not in any kind of relationship because I was willing to acknowledge

that they were homosexual men and homosexual women.

DID YOU TRY TO CHANGE SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

No, absolutely not.

I told them, I didn't care if they're a sinner, that's why they should be here. When someone got upset with me I asked them why they were here in the first place. "I believe!" they'd say. I'd tell them that if they believed, they have to fit into this ward, but in any case they were welcome to attend anytime because this is not a country club for people who are perfect.

WHAT ABOUT GAYS WHO WERE ACTIVE IN THE CHURCH AND ALSO SEXUALLY ACTIVE?

I've had a lot of gays ask me if they could move their membership to the ward, meaning, "Will you allow me to have my lover?" I replied that it's not a matter of me allowing you to do anything. I'm an administrator in the gospel, and these are my perimeters. I asked them "How would it be if I allowed unmarried heterosexuals to live together?" They responded that it's not equal since heterosexuals have the opportunity to get married. That's an issue that's unresolvable for me as an administrator for the gospel. I deal with what I have to deal with, and I try to put the teachings of the Saviour into those administrative instructions. I can't change the commandments and I still have to go by the handbook. I need to be tempered by the Spirit, but I have never been willing to say, "It's all right if you have that kind of a relationship."

People who were involved in mutual masturbation, either orally or manually, would come to see me. When I first arrived, the gay community didn't trust me. They didn't trust anybody who was a Church administrator because, historically, just the admission of having some homosexual feelings could bring on a court. If a man had a current recommend and he expressed those feelings, often his recommend was taken away or he was released from his calling. Eventually, I had people come in and talk to me. Initially they were people from my institute class who had known me for four or five years. That made it a lot easier for them. So when some finally came in and talked to me they were open and I didn't take their recommends away, I didn't

discipline them in any way simply because they felt that they might be homosexual. When people came in and confessed that they were presently or had been involved in a homosexual activity and now wanted to change, I tried to give them all the support that they were entitled to as member of the Church so that they could have the underpinning they needed to break away.

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT?

When they finally started to trust me, I had a lot of appointments. We would talk about the issues—confession, repentance, and Church discipline. In most cases there was some discipline but usually it was, "I want to meet you every week and talk about the scriptures." I asked them to read the scriptures, to do their home teaching, and really try to be sensitive to the spirit when they home taught. If somebody was involved in mutual masturbation, I met with them once a week for three months. I never said, "I demand." I would say, "What do you want to do about this situation?" "I want to get out of it," they would usually reply. "Then let's do such-and-such for the next three or four months and see if we can get you through it." I gave them permission to call me any time. If they felt a need to go dancing at a gay place, I wanted to know, even if it was two o'clock in the morning! I got some phone calls and I'd listen, and I would try to have them bring out the ultimate result of that behavior. We'd discuss whether it really was just the music that they were going to listen to or whether they were looking for a sexual outlet. I tried to let them know that I was really concerned about their personal welfare. Of course, some fell; but most of them made it through just by talking. I'd always try to meet them in the next two or three days after that phone call even if it was just for twenty minutes, just to get a report.

We had a couple of spiritual homosexual men in the ward who were assigned as home teachers to around sixteen men. I would call and tell them, "you need to go visit this person and you need to do it this week." And they would go visit; they would have a word of prayer and the person would say, "You mean you're homosexual and you're here administering to my needs in a gospel-like way?" "Yeah," they'd say. "How do you resolve it? How do you come to grips with it?" And there was discussion and understanding. I don't understand everything about homosexuals. I didn't understand a lot of things I heard. But these guys did and they really blessed

lives. This arrangement blessed the person who was having difficulty and it blessed the home teacher, because they both felt the gifts of the spirit—that's the thing that strengthens us. Then you see the result—those home teachers struggled with all their hearts wanting to help because they know the hurt that's out there more than I do.

I listen to the hurt and I try to relate to it as a father of six children. But I haven't experienced it. I probably interviewed over forty gay men and six gay women—good, wholesome beautiful experiences—and I've never had one person say, "I'm glad I'm a homosexual." They're in sorrow and feel sorrow about their sexuality, not once in awhile but twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We need to give them some tools to help them work with it. So, that's how we dealt with individuals who were homosexual.

If people were blatant in their sexuality and were unwilling to repent, I would talk to them any time they wanted to. But if, month after month after month, they were unwilling to do everything that I'd asked them to do, then I would say, "Hey, how do you feel about not being a home teacher? How would you feel about not partaking of the sacrament?" Most of them would say, "I haven't been home teaching because I don't feel good about it." "I haven't been taking the sacrament." The Spirit teaches that, too. The Spirit gives light to people. And I tried to get the spirit in them, to give them even a slight opportunity to have a spiritual experience, because that's what strengthens us. In the high council meeting we talked about kicking them out of the Church. We got in a discussion about what's the most grievous sin. It was interesting, they were willing to grade everything—this is the most serious, then this is the next, and so on. "The Savior says that 'the least degree of sinners aren't acceptable in God's kingdom.' And that's why Jesus died for our sins. So which sin is the most grievous?" It's the "least degree of sin" that is going to keep me out of the kingdom of God until I'm willing to repent of it. That's the mentality we need to give to people, that we're all sinners.

WASN'T ALL THIS COUNSELLING BURDENSOME?

Eventually, I started dealing with a fairly large number of men and women who had a sexual orientation problem. They were drowning. They had gone through confession, they had gone through the criteria which I set for them to get back into full fellowship in the

Church, but I was still meeting on a one-to-one basis with them because they needed the support, just somebody to talk to. Finally I said, "I can't handle this, it's killing me. I need to meet with them as a group." I prayed and fasted about it and asked five individuals if they would be interested in coming once a week to my house to talk together as a group.

Initially, I got three to agree and four showed up. Interestingly, the next week I got a call from LDS Social Services asking me if I would be willing to lead a gay support group. (Social Services had started to call me every now and then about my thoughts and actions regarding gay issues.) So with permission of my stake president I expanded the group to include individuals from the Bay area. The next week we had twelve people attend. Overall seventeen or eighteen probably participated. For about two years, we sat for three hours every Saturday in my TV room. They criticized people in the Church for being unkind and uncaring. They discussed what they believed about the gospel, how it all came down to the bottom line that they knew that Jesus was the Christ. They believed in the Restoration of his gospel. Then I said, "Why are we meeting? Why are we here? Let's talk about some things about the Church. We don't want to be critical of the Church, but from our own point of view if the Church did some things differently how it might help kids?" They recognized that there was no way the Church was going to address the issues of a thirty-five year old gay but it might address the issue of a twelve-year-old kid. So we wrote eight issue papers. We assigned topics: homosexuality what it is, what it isn't, etc. Then we discussed them, really beat them up, and refined them to make sure that they were correct.

We talked about self-esteem: What the Church does and doesn't do to build self-esteem in someone who's homosexual, and what it could do. It was a tough paper because it meant that we became critical, but it was a non-threatening critical paper. We talked about Social Services because several of the guys in the group had had rough treatment from them. We talked about how parents feel when they suspect they have a child who's homosexual. We explored the scriptures, the myth and the reality. The papers were well done. When we finished we discussed what to do with them and decided that we needed to go through the line of authority and whatever the next person above wanted to do with the papers he could do.

Just as we were finishing, Alan Gundry, who works with homosexual concerns for

LDS Social Services in Salt Lake, phoned and asked if he could come out and visit with us. He and another man visited the group and also interviewed almost everyone individually. Later both men said it was a great experience. We finally gave the papers to the stake president who asked the group to come to the high council room and present the reports to the stake presidency and the executive secretary. Initially the group was reluctant: "What's the stake president going to do?" "Is he going to take down all our names?" I said, "No, we've done the job, we've been prayerful about it, let's present it to them." And so each person who prepared the paper gave a brief overview of that paper and had an interesting conversation with the stake presidency. I had kept the stake president abreast of what we were doing and what I felt was going on.

We thanked them for accepting the papers and they in turn gave them to our regional representative who, we later found out, had been a bishop in San Francisco during the sixties. I guess he read through them, because at an area conference he asked President Monson to read them and President Monson said to talk to Elders Wirthlin and Brewerton. The following Tuesday Elder Brewerton, who was in our area presidency, phoned our stake president and asked him about the makeup of the ward. So that whole thing went full cycle.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GROUP?

It became a ward home evening group called the Farside. You know, you do some things that are just stupid. I've sat in this room and said things and the group members look at me and say, "Bishop, don't say that." Apparently I'd used a slang word that has a significantly different meaning in the gay community. One day I said, "You know, you guys remind of the comic strip *The Farside*. Sometimes I don't understand it, it just goes right by me." So when they set up the home evening group they called it the Farside home evening group. Once somebody from Salt Lake called and said, "they even have a home evening group called the 'farside,' now what else could that mean except homosexual activity?" If they would read the comic strip they would see that there was humor in the title. It's called the Farside home evening group because we had the north, south, east, and west home evening groups, and now we also have the Farside group.

HOW DID THE WARD ACCEPT A GAY GROUP?

There was hostility at first. The sisters felt threatened when they heard about the group meeting at my house. Many thought that anybody who was gay ought to be out of the Church, and it certainly cut down their chances of getting married by having all those gay men in the ward. It was a trial for our ward. I went in and took a whole Relief Society meeting to discuss the issue. I said, "What do you think is happening?" And they started telling me. Then I shared my views. We classified sin from the greatest to the least, including homosexuality. I said "all these are covered by the Atonement." That really threatens people because that's the truth. I said, "you know many men who are gay in this ward, but you don't know who the gay women are." They looked around, surprised, like "there are no gay women in our ward." I said, "Yes, there are some." The truth is good for us, and so we had good meeting. The sisters really changed their attitudes toward these guys.

Later, I had eight hispanic women meet with me. They felt sorry for the caucasians because some of them were gay. They thought that since the Lamanites were going to blossom as a rose that Heavenly Father would never allow a hispanic man to be gay. They really got angry with me when I told them that there were some hispanic members of the priesthood that will probably never be married. Not that they were actively involved in a relationship with a man but their sexual orientation was not heterosexual. That was practically blasphemy in their eyes, and they struggled with it. I probably helped six of them feel okay, but several went back to the Spanish ward.

A month later the elders quorum president came and said that there were some men in the ward struggling with what I was doing, too. So I spoke with the priesthood, and we had one of the best meetings I've ever been in. It really tempered everybody. It was as helpful for the homosexual men as it was for the straight. We discussed how there are men in the ward who have really come unto Christ and how some of them are gay but who will not participate in a homosexual relationship because they love the Savior. It's not an easy task and they struggle with it. When the straight men found out about their dedication to the Savior, real empathy occurred and a bridge was built.

It surprised the sisters of the ward, and some of the brethren, too, when they found

out that the gays who were visiting them had been more exact in their responsibilities as a home teacher than anybody they'd ever had. They'd see a need in the home, and the next time they'd contact me they'd tell me that the need had been met. They always had a word of prayer in the home. Many priesthood brethren don't feel that that's too important, but we really don't know what's going through a person's mind when we go into their home and we need to leave a blessing and a prayer. If someone was sick there was a card in the mail. They were caring home teachers. Then to have them come out gay! How could that be possible? The members finally got over that, and it's been a good example to the straight brethren that haven't been as caring of home teachers as they should be. As a result, the quality of home teaching increased. I'm not saying that there were no straight men in the ward who weren't just as caring, loving, and kind home teachers. But the percentage of those who were gay and who were really doing their job was higher than that of the straights.

When President Hinckley said in general priesthood meeting that marriage was not to be encouraged as therapy for homosexuality, that really excited our ward because it kind of validated what we were doing. It made it okay that these guys probably shouldn't get married and the sisters could really be a friend to them, knowing that they were not going to marry them. It helped because sometimes women would come in and wonder if they should marry their home teacher. They'd say, "Why is he serving me so well unless he loves me?" I'd say, "Now you be careful, I'm not sure that person is interested in getting married." I wouldn't say he was gay, but sometimes the home teacher would tell them.

HOW OPEN WERE THE GAY MEMBERS?

A lot of the gays in the ward, especially in priesthood meetings, have publicly said "I'll probably never get married because my sexual orientation isn't the same as yours." That gets around in the ward. At first it was damaging, but now it's not. I think we're healthier emotionally and spiritually.

WHAT ABOUT THE AIDS PROJECT?

It's called the San Francisco Singles Ward LDS AIDS Project. About three-and-a-half years ago a medical student who had been

our elders quorum president and a gospel doctrine teacher found out he had leukemia two days before he graduated from medical school. It was devastating to the ward because he had served so many people so well. To have him deteriorate in a eight or nine month period of time was really a heart wrenching experience for the whole congregation. Even though he had gotten married, he stayed in our ward until he died so he wouldn't catch diseases from little children. Our ward served him. He didn't want to go to a hospital. He wanted a hospice to take care of him. The members of the ward sat with him so that his wife, who was also a medical student, could have time to herself for her own mental health. It brought us together as a ward family.

Later, we had a guy come to the ward who was gay and who had AIDS. He didn't even realize that the Church was in San Francisco. When he found out he came and talked to me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Here he was with this disease that was going to take his life; he sensed that he didn't have too many months to live. He was a delightful person, full of energy. He went through the process of repentance. Whether it was because of his disease, I don't know; I'm not going to make that judgment. All I know is that he came in and confessed his sins and had Godly sorrow. As a pastor, I wondered how the ward was going to care for him. Here was a person that had attended our Church probably six Sundays total. Once, he stood up and bore his testimony when he was just barely able to get around. But when we sent around a sign-up sheet for eighteen hours a day service, I was amazed. The members didn't care if it was the man who had served them so well as elders quorum president or this man, he was a son of God. They gave over 700 hours of loving care for Tom. When we had his funeral the ward was there.

In our bishopric meeting we discussed the people in our ward who we knew were infected with AIDS. What was going to happen when a dozen infected people came to us and wanted to come back to the gospel? Were we prepared? We decided to develop a pamphlet and have a series of four lessons to help us better serve people who are dying.

Jim Lemmon had been giving volunteer help to support people with AIDS—taking people to the doctor, picking up dry cleaning, going to the grocery store, etc. He went and got training to also give emotional support—the spiritual support to pick people up, to listen, to help them cope with some hard times. It's very difficult to do and you need training. My wife volunteered every

week for one four-hour shift. Sometimes she would come home emotionally stressed; it's important that people who are rendering that kind of service also be fed themselves. And so Jim trained members of the ward in a four-week course with eight students taught during Sunday School. People sign up for it and it's always full. Among other things it teaches that when you're caring for somebody with AIDS you need to be cautious of certain things. It's beautiful because it's just the plainness of the gospel of Jesus Christ—caring for people who are really in need.

The love of the ward members was unconditional for these people. They're single, they know what heartache is, they know what loneliness is. They don't want somebody who's dying to be alone because they don't like to be alone while they're living. It's a great thing. Our stake president has looked at the program; he's got some concerns, and they will be addressed. I think preparation needs to be made in other metropolitan areas of the Church. I feel sure that in London, New York, and Los Angeles there's a fairly large group of homosexual people there. It would be a blessing to a congregation to be better prepared. There are two ways you can address people with AIDS: you can say, "Go to the gay community, we don't want anything to do with you," or you can minister to their needs.

DID YOU SEEK OUT INACTIVE GAYS?

At a stake conference Apostle David Haight once charged the stake to find the people that were not active in the Church. "I'll give you the resources that you need to do that," he said. That was really a dynamic experience because everybody knew that he was talking about gays. We need to get the people out of the caves of San Francisco who are hiding from the Church. As a result for five years we've had missionary couples in the San Francisco single adult ward. These full-time missionary couples were great men and women, they literally went out and found the people that were hiding. Most of them are homosexual men. And most of them are still hiding. But they brought back a lot of people, it was a great blessing to our ward and to our stake.

WHAT ABOUT PARENTS OF GAYS?

Parents would notify us that their inactive gay child was living in the city. We always struggled with the request to visit them,

because it had to do with free agency, you know. Does an adult child have the right to be in San Francisco as a free agent? Does the parent have the right to phone the bishop and say, "Go visit my child?" Sure. If my child were in a strange country or a strange place, I might phone the bishop and say, "Will you go visit my child." So we were always faithful when discharging that request. But most times we were not successful, and that was hard. But that was what the Lord asked us to do, so we went. Who knows, maybe when that person really gets in a crisis he will remember that we visited him and come back or ask for help. It's always interested me that when you read the bishop's handbook where it talks about welfare services, not just funds, but welfare services, the bishop's responsibility is to not just serve people who come to him but his charge is to go out and service people.

Probably one of the most difficult things I've had to deal with was a fine mother and father who would come to visit their son dying of AIDS. And the first thing they would ask me was, "When are you going to hold the court on my son?" "What do you mean?" "Well, he needs to be excommunicated from the Church." "Why?" And they would start to unravel their perception of what needed to take place. I would tell them about their son coming to me and telling me about his life, and the mighty change I witnessed take place in his life. And yet, when they would see their son in a coma before he died they wanted a court so he was out of the Church. I don't understand that. I don't understand that. I don't think they understand the power of the Atonement, the power of forgiveness and repentance.

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH NEED TO DO TO ADDRESS HOMOSEXUALITY?

I would hope that the Church would give to those who pastor the tools really necessary to help young homosexuals. We have all the resources in the world and out of the world to give whatever we have to people so that their lives can be better. The gay men and the gay women in this ward are good people and they are emotionally happier because they feel spiritually secure, knowing that these are the means and bounds of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to teach that to gays when they're young.

The youngest person that I talked to said he was seven when he felt that he was gay. When he saw his brothers and sisters interact he thought there was something wrong with

him because he didn't feel the way they did. One man told me that when he was sixteen his best buddy started dating one of the Laurels and he became furious. He asked himself, "What's going on with me?" Who could he talk to about that? Who is qualified in the Church to talk to him? He tells his mother, "I'm really mad that Bruce has gone out with this girl, he shouldn't be going out with her, he should be going out with me because he's my boyfriend." What would the mother say? "You'll get over it." Sometimes they don't get over it. What do they do with those feelings? Can we give them the emotional and psychological aid to help them through? I don't know the answers. I wish I did.

A psychiatrist at Children's Hospital came up to me and said, "I have two little children, two little boys that are four that I'm working with." This man's a high priest in the Church, he's a psychiatrist, he specializes in children, how does he know that they're gay? Have those four-year-olds made the choice to be gay? Not a chance. There's something there that needs to be brought out, the Church needs to invest in resources to find out really what it is and what it isn't. And then when we find out what it is, we need to give the support needed. Is 8 percent of the Church's male population gay? It probably is. Are they worth helping? Sure they are! In the next thirty years I hope that we can learn to deal with a four-year-old and a ten-year-old in a clinical and gospel way so that when the guy's fifty-five and sixty he will live in a better environment. But for the Church to start dealing with the needs of a thirty-two-year-old is pretty difficult. I think even those people who've taken the hardest stand against homosexuals would be sympathetic to dealing with the needs of a child.

HOW DO WE CHANGE OUR ATTITUDES TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY?

That's a very difficult question. I teach seminary right now, and we just discussed the first chapters of Romans. It's sad to listen to the mean responses of these high school juniors and seniors toward homosexuals. And we live in San Francisco! You'd think that that influence would temper them to some degree but, boy, there's a lot of hostility.

One man in the ward grew up in Salt Lake City. Once the guys in his priest quorum invited him to Liberty Park and he came home with a bloodied, torn, white shirt, black eye, tear in his lip, puffy ear. "What's wrong, what

did you do?" asked his mother, a first-generation American—she and her husband came from the old country. He said, "The priest quorum beat me up." "Why?" "Because I'm gay." "What do you mean gay?" "They think I'm a homosexual." (Up to then, he never had had a homosexual experience, never really entertained the idea that he was homosexual, although he had a light frame and was slightly feminine.) She said, "What's homosexual?" "They think I love men more than women." "Get out of my house," she said. Fifteen-and-a-half! That should not happen, he's a child of God, too, whatever his problem. When he became an alcoholic he was willing to have sex with anything, he didn't care what he was when he was drunk. But every time he got sober, he had remorse. You know, that's not fair. Why did that happen?

I think of another person who served a fine mission. Came home from his mission, tried to do everything the Church wanted him to do. Dated, but never did get married. His mother and father suspected that he might be homosexual. Because the Church supports the thesis that homosexuality is caused by a dominate mother and a passive father, his mother was really troubled and had a nervous breakdown. She's raised a fine family, and this son is a fine person. He became angry at the Church, not because of what he's going through but because of the anguish and terror he saw his mother go through. He said, "I'm never going to go back. I'm going to separate myself from my mother so she can forget that she had me." That shouldn't happen. Those are the most unkind things. I see a kid in pain like that and it breaks my heart. When they cry, I cry because I feel it. I know that this woman was not an over-dominant mother. And I know that her husband was not a passive husband or father.

Leaders would serve the Church well by saying to mothers and fathers: love your children regardless of what their problems are, and these are the helps that we can give to you to help you through any kind of a crisis with your child. If your child's in drugs, these are the things you can do, these are positive good things, resources to use. If their compulsive problem is sex, and for a lot of teenagers sex is a new toy, this is how to deal with it so that you can save your child's life. If he or she's homosexual these are the things you do. There has to be some answers to those things. I don't know what they are. I know that love, unconditional love, goes a long way. But to really help people I think you need somebody like an Alan Gundry, or like a Dr. Ferre at Children's Hospital in Salt Lake,

people that understand the gospel but also know the complications of our minds.

I talked to an LDS psychiatrist in Southern California and I got so mad. I could not believe this man's mind. He was to my way of thinking so far afield from the truth. He was still talking electric shock. He was still talking that every person can be corrected. That idea needs to be put to bed. Every person cannot be corrected. I think some can be helped so that they can even live in married life, but not everyone. What are the resources that are needed then to help people? I don't know. It almost motivates me to go back to school so I could become a psychiatrist. But I can't read well enough, I can't write well enough. But there's somebody out there that can do it. I know that there is an answer. I think if the Prophet Joseph were alive, you could probably go knock on his door and say, "Joseph, what do you think about this issue?" He probably would ponder it a long while. But I think he would probably give you a pretty good concise answer. When we sat in my TV room with the group, our prayers were that maybe at some point the prophet would get our papers and ask Heavenly Father what should happen. Not that the Church's doctrine needs to be altered or changed, but just to know what to do.

THIS CALLING HAS CHANGED YOUR LIFE.

It's been the most unique experience I've had because I felt the spirit so often. I would literally get in my car at 10 o'clock at the church on a Sunday evening, exhausted, and the next thing be turning off my lights in the garage and not remember driving home—really not remember. That was scary. I believe with all my heart there are ministering angels. I've had members of my bishopric—members who at one time lived in a gay relationship with a companion and who went through a court and through the process of repentance that the Church demanded of that person, but who was still a homosexual man—set people apart, and you felt the power of the priesthood through the Holy Ghost going through that person and then have the person being set apart stand up and look right into his eyes and say, "for the first time in my life I understand a section in my patriarchal blessing I've never understood." Can gay men have the gift the Holy Ghost? You bet, there's no doubt in my mind! It didn't just happen once, it happened many times because the Holy Ghost blesses those who seek it and are willing to

live a Christ-like life. And this guy was doing everything he could do to do exactly what the Church required of him, except that he could not take a wife because he knew that it would hurt her.

I really cherish the experience I had as a bishop, it was a sacred experience—the whole

thing. You get so intimately involved with people's lives. And you really see how a small amount of input can get such great results. That's the thing they wanted, just a little bit of love from a Church administrator. It just makes them fly. ☺

PSALM

FOR MT. AIR

I awake to the songs of birds;
the sounds of thy creatures awakeneth me.
Thy skies are the blue of thy deepest waters;
deep and broad are they in their invitation
to my soul to soar.

In mine eyes are thy words;
in my heart the songs of rejoicing in thee.

Blessed, O God, be the quiverings of life
in the branches of trees, in my limbs;
and holy be the sun on the leaves and needles
and on the hair of my head
and the feeling beneath it.

I bow to the joy of thy bounty;
I raise up my voice to sing praises
for the grace of thy hand in all the world.

Here in the thickets of thy kindness
and the beauty of thy hand
thou makest me still to know
thou art indeed God.

—EMMA LOU THAYNE

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