

A Speech the Church Would Not Hear

Gene Leggett, gay Methodist minister, Southwest Texas Conference, currently suspended by involuntary location.

Sisters and brothers of the Church: Ever since I publicly announced that I am gay, the Church has ~~refused~~ ^{been unable} to relate to me as an individual Christian and brother and has seen me only under a blanket condemnation of homosexuality - or at best, ^{it has seen me as} an omnibus of insoluble problems. Time and again I have been told that this is not true - that I have been surrounded with the love of the Church. I ~~have-been~~ ^{am always} reminded that I have been given every opportunity to speak - as even now I am allowed to speak before this representative body. It is true that there have been some church people - primarily from disenfranchised groups such as women, youth, blacks and even some men - who have opened themselves to me in love. I could not be standing here now if I did not feel this support.

However, to the majority of you men I must say that I have ~~never felt~~ ^{never experienced} such a void of love as I have felt from the majority of the Church today in the crushing reality of deaf ears, hostile actions and frightened parliamentary procedure. My heart goes out to you because I know your response - or lack of response - comes out of your fear and ignorance. I pray that God will lift this burden from you.

This morning the Church held a true hand of fellowship to my gay sisters and brothers. Just as quickly the hand was withdrawn ^{by an amendment} with vague references to Christian doctrine. Now it is unclear whether this is doctrine or teaching. Of course there are no Christian doctrines against homosexuality. There are no Methodist doctrines in our discipline that mention homosexuality. And I would submit that there has been little teaching on the subject.

There are clear biblical injunctions against homosexuality with which we must deal. These are cultural prejudices no stronger than those against masturbation or women speaking in church. The gospels do not mention ^{homosexuality} it at all. The heaviest prejudices, which have colored our opinions or teachings to this day, came into the church during that period when celibacy was exalted and all sex acts without the intent of procreation were seen as acts of the devil. From that time, acts of homosexuality have been against the mainstream of Christian teaching. Homosexuals were put to death as witches because of this teaching. Today we are killed in more civilized ways.. Now if the Church cannot see the untold suffering that this teaching has caused, it stands ⁱⁿ under God's judgment. The teaching of the Church in this matter does not need to be held

up at this time; the oppression and suffering of gay people ^{do.} ~~does~~. Thus, in this moment of history, I suggest to you that the Hand amendment adopted this morning is outside the mainstream of Christian love and should ~~not~~ be condoned.

Of course, I am a sinner. I stand with all ^{of you,} my sisters and brothers, ~~today~~ under Gods judgment and grace. And, that, my beloved friends, is Christian doctrine and teaching.

No person should be judged on the basis of such strange and unclear categories as hetero, homo or bi-sexual. Do not ask if the homosexual can relate in a healthy manner to children; ask me if I can relate in a healthy manner to children. Don't question the ability of homosexuals to work in church agencies; question Earnest Reaugh's ability to work in church agencies.

All of us - men and women, women and women, men, ^{women +} ~~and~~ children, men and men, relate to each other on multi-levels of sexuality which carry with them the possibilities of estrangement or communion. I live for the day when the Church guards and protects my sisters and brothers from estrangement and holds up and ~~nsntures~~ ^{nurtures} the possibilities of communion. This will be true liberation for all of us.