


2010

Pastoral Perspectives from Your General Superintendents on Homosexuality

Board of General Superintendents. Church of the Nazarene

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.olivet.edu/pres_facp

 Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Church of the Nazarene, Board of General Superintendents., "Pastoral Perspectives from Your General Superintendents on Homosexuality" (2010). *Scholarship – President's Office*. 2.
https://digitalcommons.olivet.edu/pres_facp/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the President's Office at Digital Commons @ Olivet. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship – President's Office by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Olivet. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@olivet.edu.

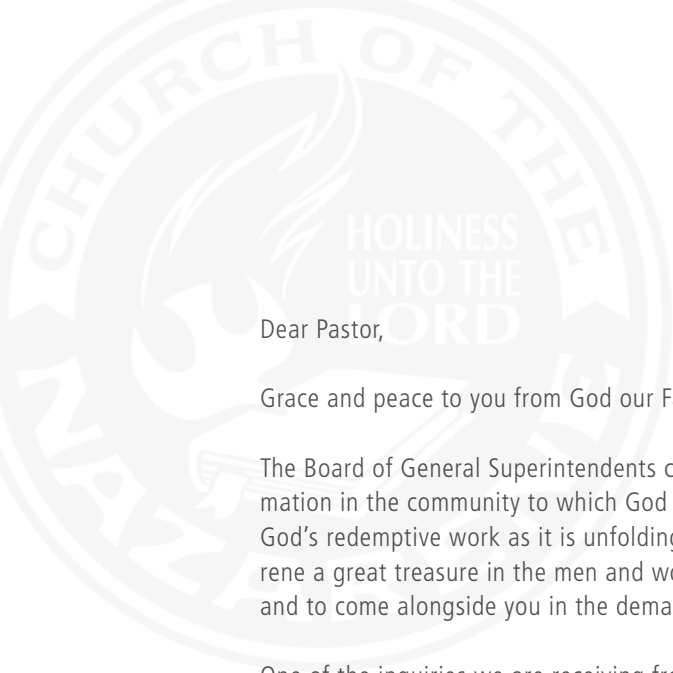


{ PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES

FROM YOUR GENERAL SUPERINTENDENTS

on

Homosexuality



Dear Pastor,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Board of General Superintendents celebrates your faithful service as an agent of Kingdom transformation in the community to which God has called you. What a joy to see devoted pastors at the heart of God's redemptive work as it is unfolding in every corner of the world. God gives the Church of the Nazarene a great treasure in the men and women He calls to serve as our pastors. We want to encourage you and to come alongside you in the demands of ministry.

One of the inquiries we are receiving from our pastors expresses a desire to better understand ministry among individuals and families dealing with homosexuality. In the midst of a broad spectrum of responses that range from unconditional approval to loveless judgmentalism, how do our pastors and churches engage in this ministry? This booklet is intended to assist in affirming the position of our church and clarifying the understanding of Scripture regarding homosexuality and how you and your congregation can be a much-needed community of hope-filled truth and grace.

Our prayer is that this resource will equip and encourage you as you endeavor to be faithful in the complexities of pastoral ministry. May the God of grace "do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20).

Faithfully yours,

The Board of General Superintendents

JAMES H. DIEHL | PAUL G. CUNNINGHAM | JERRY D. PORTER | JESSE C. MIDDENDORF | NINA G. GUNTER | J. K. WARRICK

{ Church of the Nazarene: A Pastoral Perspective on Homosexuality

Once upon a time homosexuality and the homosexual community were distant concerns for those who led a local church. Now it is a reality in our day-to-day ministry. We are faced with friends and relatives, co-workers and church leaders who in one way or another are dealing with homosexuality. It is an issue that confronts us in the newspaper, on the television, and in our local schools. It is an issue that is tearing apart friendships, churches, and homes.

Our initial reaction to homosexuality may be one of anger, rejection, or repulsion. At one time, homosexuality was an issue that was dismissed with a simple "It's wrong." Some responded with name calling, jokes, or clichés. This kind of response is neither helpful nor Christlike. As pastors, we are called to a Christlike response.

Pastors sit face-to-face with those who struggle with sexual orientation. Some are broken and empty, others are angry and militant. Here are some of the questions they ask, and a pastoral response informed by a Wesleyan theology.

What is the position of our church regarding homosexuality?

The position of the Church of the Nazarene is articulated in the "Human Sexuality" statement in the *Manual* and the official statement of the Board of General Superintendents.

Manual-Human Sexuality: 37. The Church of the Nazarene views human sexuality as one expression of the holiness and beauty that God the Creator intended for His creation. It

is one of the ways by which the covenant between a husband and a wife is sealed and expressed. Christians are to understand that in marriage human sexuality can and ought to be sanctified by God. Human sexuality achieves fulfillment only as a sign of comprehensive love and loyalty. Christian husbands and wives should view sexuality as a part of their much larger commitment to one another and to Christ from whom the meaning of life is drawn.

The Christian home should serve as a setting for teaching children the sacred character of human sexuality and for showing them how its meaning is fulfilled in the context of love, fidelity, and patience.

Our ministers and Christian educators should state clearly the Christian understanding of human sexuality, urging Christians to celebrate its rightful excellence, and rigorously guard against its betrayal and distortion.

Sexuality misses its purpose when treated as an end in itself or when cheapened by using another person to satisfy pornographic and perverted sexual interests. We view all forms of sexual intimacy that occur outside the covenant of heterosexual marriage as sinful distortions of the holiness and beauty God intended for it.

Homosexuality is one means by which human sexuality is perverted. We recognize the depth of the perversion that leads to homosexual acts but affirm the biblical position that such acts are sinful and subject to the wrath of God. We believe the grace of God sufficient to overcome the practice of homosexuality (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We deplore any action or statement that would seem to imply compatibility between Christian morality and the practice of homosexuality. We urge clear preaching and teaching concerning Bible

standards of sexual morality. (1 Timothy 1:8-10)

— 2005-2009 Manual of the Church of the Nazarene

Official Statement: The Church of the Nazarene believes that every man or woman should be treated with dignity, grace, and holy love, whatever their sexual orientation. However, we continue to firmly hold the position that the homosexual lifestyle is sinful and is contrary to the Scriptures.

We further wish to reemphasize our call to Nazarenes around the globe to recommit themselves to a life of holiness, characterized by holy love and expressed through the most rigorous and consistent lifestyle of sexual purity. We stand firmly on the belief that the biblical concept of marriage, always between one man and one woman in a committed, lifelong relationship, is the only relationship within which the gift of sexual intimacy is properly expressed.

— Board of General Superintendents

How does our church come to the position it does on homosexuality?

The two main reference points would be what Scripture and Christian tradition tell us.

What the Bible Tells Us About Homosexuality: We need to first be clear about what the Bible does not say. The Bible says nothing about homosexuality as the term is often used today. Homosexuality is often used today to describe a person's sexual orientation. The Bible does not address homosexual orientation. What the Bible does talk about are homosexual acts. We need to be clear on this, and to not say more than the Bible says. One of the problems in the destructive debates that are taking place is lack of clarity at this very point.

Scholars considering both sides of the "homosexual question" generally agree on the six or so passages in Scripture that directly address homosexual activity. There are sev-

eral reasons for the small number of passages. One reason is that it appears the idea that homosexual practice could be compatible with Israelite or Christian lives was never considered in biblical times. Both Old and New Testaments are consistent in their rejection of homosexual activity, and it appears that neither Old Testament Israel nor the New Testament church ever considered homosexual practice as something that would be allowed in their faith communities. Another reason is that the passages mentioning homosexual activity give no indication that this was an important issue. Whether the reasons were sociological, psychological or spiritual, there is no indication that Israelites or Christians frequently struggled with the temptation or the pull toward homosexual practices.

The first two passages from the Old Testament are narrative passages that are quite similar to each other. **Genesis 19:1-11** where the two angels who had first appeared to Abraham enter the city of Sodom and are invited to spend the night with Lot, Abraham's nephew. The men of Sodom surrounded Lot's house and demanded he bring the two "men" out so they could have sex with them. While Lot does not appeal to any commandments prohibiting the homosexual activity desired by the men of Sodom, he does describe their request as "wicked." The story unfolds in such a way that the request of the men of Sodom is not fulfilled. In this passage homosexual practice is the example given of the excessive wickedness of the city. It should also be noted that Sodom was not considered part of Israel. In this case the homosexual desires of the men of Sodom represent a pagan reality rather than something practiced or tolerated in Israel.

The second passage is similar to the first. It appears in **Judges 19** where a man and his concubine were journeying from Bethlehem north to the hill country of Ephraim. They stopped to spend the night in Gibeah, a few miles north of Jerusalem. They were offered hospitality and a place to

spend the night by an old man in Gibeah. Men of the city surrounded the house and demanded the old man bring his male guest out so they could have sex with him. This is one of the most horrible stories of the Bible. Once again, there is no appeal to a law against homosexual practice. However, these are not pagans, but Israelites who were pounding on the door wanting to have sexual relations with the male guest of the old man. Further, the text regularly uses negative words to describe the proposed homosexual actions of the men of Gibeah. They were described as "wicked men" and their actions described as "vile" and "disgraceful." Even so, the homosexual desires of this story are only a sidelight illustrating the perversity of the men of Gibeah. The gang rape and abuse of the concubine should be the center of our attention.

The third place in the Old Testament addressing homosexual practice appears in the section often referred to as the Levitical Holiness Code. **Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13** clearly prohibit sexual relations between men. Here in the midst of commands regarding forbidden sexual relationships we have a direct commandment of Scripture forbidding male homosexual practice. While the command prohibiting homosexual acts is stated clearly, it is placed among similar commands regarding circumcision, grooming, diet, planting fields, blending fabrics and sexual relations during menstruation. The church remains faced with the task of interpreting the whole of Scripture and discerning what would be set aside as ceremonial or ritual law for the culture and what remains as moral law for the community of Jesus' followers. The New Testament describes clearly how the early church upholds prohibition of homosexual acts.

In the New Testament we once again have two passages that are similar in format. **1 Timothy 1:9-10** contains a list of sins and sinners that are contrary to the gospel. Here, homosexual men (the Greek is clear that it is men) are listed with murderers, sexually immoral men, kidnappers and liars

as persons practicing things contrary to the gospel. The Greek word used here is a bit unusual, as the modern translations reveal. The NIV has “perverts,” the *Good News Bible* has “sexual pervert,” and the NRSV has “sodomites.” The Greek word appears to have been coined by Paul out of the Greek translation of Leviticus 18:22 that we’ve just discussed. Despite the unusual word, it is clear that male homosexual practice is contrary to the gospel.

A similar passage is found in **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**. Here we have a list of people who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul uses two words for those involved in homosexual practice. The second, translated here in the NIV as “homosexual offenders,” is the same word used in **1 Timothy 1:10**. The first word, translated here as “male prostitutes,” is a word with several meanings. Its most basic meaning is “soft.” Some translations render it with the English word “effeminate,” which is unfortunate. The word was used in a kind of slang way in the New Testament era for the passive or receiving partner in a male homosexual relationship. The *New American Bible* translates the word as “boy prostitutes.” The word “prostitutes” is a bit misleading to us because the issue was not the financial transaction. Rather, the term describes young men who offered themselves to men seeking homosexual activity. Thus the two terms in 1 Corinthians 6:9 indicate first the passive and then the active partners in a homosexual erotic relationship. Again, this is clearly rejected as incompatible with Christian life.

The clearest and most detailed passage dealing with homosexual practice in the New Testament is **Romans 1:18-32**. The passage is not about homosexuality nor homosexual practice in particular. It is about God’s wrath being revealed against human unrighteousness. Homosexual practice enters the text as an illustration of one of the worst forms of human unrighteousness. Technically, the passage does not say that God’s wrath is revealed

against sins such as homosexual practice, but rather that homosexual practices are an expression of the wrath of God bringing horrible consequences into the lives of people who think they know better than God. The flow of Paul's argument is that homosexual practice is a degrading outcome of refusing to acknowledge God as God and of exchanging the glory of God for human desires. It is equally clear that for this argument to be made, Paul considered homosexual practice contrary to the will of God. His language echoes the words of several philosophers of that age who argued that homosexual practice was contrary to nature and a disgusting rejection of God's creation design. Note also that for the first time in Scripture, female homosexual practice is rejected along with male homosexual practice.

The few biblical texts that speak of homosexual activity all do so with unqualified disapproval, and the whole of the biblical witness speaks as one voice prohibiting homosexual activity. The church has always taken the sexual instructions of Scripture as universal. Expressions of human sexuality have some variation according to culture, but human sexuality is an essential and core element of our humanness. It is not culturally bound or culturally conditioned. In fact, Genesis 1 and 2 make it clear that human sexuality is a significant part of our humanity in the image of God. Therefore, God's creation design of the sexual relationship between males and females is a universal, not a cultural matter. The only exception Scripture admits is for celibacy. Other than celibacy, Scripture considers a monogamous marriage as the only appropriate context in which sexual intimacy is expressed. For that reason, we do not regard the biblical condemnations of homosexual practice as culturally outdated portions of Scripture that we can choose to disregard. From a biblical perspective homosexual practice is a sin. There is no getting around it.

What Church Tradition Tells Us About Homosexuality:

Contrary to setting aside the Scriptural prohibition, Church

tradition has for more than nineteen hundred years served to strengthen prohibition of homosexual behavior as contrary to the will of God. The major voices through the history of the Church have condemned homosexual behavior as sinful/immoral. The early Church (A.D. 100-600) condemned homosexual behavior. The *Didache*, an early theological document, lists *arsenokoitia* and *paidophthoria* (both words denote homosexual behavior) along with fornication and adultery as sinful/immoral. Tertullian, Theophilus, Origen, Athenogoras, and Clement of Alexandria all associate homosexuality with what is unnatural. John Chrysostom felt that genuine pleasure can only come from what is natural, therefore homosexual behavior could not bring true pleasure. All of these theologians tended to link the lust of the Sodomites to the moral challenge posed by homosexual behavior.

Augustine, a fifth-century theologian, is pivotal for understanding the Christian faith. He makes a distinction which bears upon the moral argument against homosexual behavior. This distinction between ordered love (charity) and disordered love (cupidity) is fundamental for understanding his theology. It is also crucial for considering questions of morality. When we love God first, all other loves come into healthy focus. When we love self first, all other loves are distorted. Life, when it is centered on the self, is unhealthy. Disordered love explains the nature of sin and the circumstance of the world for Augustine. One example of this disorder is homosexuality. Sin is linked by Augustine to concupiscence (lust). When love is disordered we reverse the order intended by God, that is, we love self before God. This constitutes part of the reason that Augustine refers to homosexual acts as shameful. Like others in the early Church, Augustine considers the lust of the Sodomites to be at the root of homosexual behavior.

Aquinas, the great thirteenth-century theologian, described homosexual behavior as violating God's intent for

human behavior. Luther, the sixteenth-century German Reformer, linked the practice and toleration of homosexuality to the spiritual decay of the Roman Catholic Church. He agrees with the patristic church that the judgment of God on the Sodomites was directed toward unnatural lust. John Calvin condemned the internal disposition of homosexual behavior.

A Wesleyan response is defined by a clear conviction that homosexual behavior is immoral. The Scripture speaks to the issue with sufficient clarity to make it plain to all that homosexual behavior is part of fallen nature.

Has the cause of homosexuality been scientifically proven or is it simply a choice?

What we do know from walking with people in a fallen world is that homosexuality is real, it tends to begin early, and it is rarely a choice. There have been a number of scientific experiments done to determine the answer to the “cause” question. The findings of these experiments are inconclusive. Theories range from the cause being genetic, hormonal, or physical. Some of the experiments suggest that homosexuality is a part of a person’s constitutional make-up, like being left-handed or blue-eyed. But, these reports have been refuted and rejected as biased.

Other theories are based on environmental and experiential influences. One is that disordered family relationships can leave people confused about their sexual identity. Another theory says that experimentation at critical stages of sexual development, voluntary or involuntary, may lead to homosexuality.

To date, there is no evidence upon which to draw any of these conclusions. We need to be careful about accepting uncritically the so-called scientific findings on either side of the homosexuality debate. Research is still in progress and much of it is twisted by personal agendas

of researchers. The fact is there is presently no scientific explanation for why some people are homosexual. The answer could be one of the above theories, or a combination of these experiences or something that scientists have not encountered thus far. It is not unlike similar research that offers empirical evidence on both sides of the effect of behavioral conditioning or genetic predisposition for any of a number of other sinful behaviors. Present research does not negate what the Bible says about the sinful behavior. As pastors we have clear biblical direction regarding homosexual behavior, and we do not wait for scientific explanation to determine our pastoral role in this matter.

What about the person who wrestles with an orientation they did not choose?

Our biblical and theological understanding of sin suggests that it is both personal and corporate. We personally choose to sin and are responsible/accountable to God for the willful choices that we make. Sexual orientation is not usually a willful choice. (Can the heterosexual point to a time they chose their sexual orientation?) It is amoral, neither moral nor immoral. Sexual behavior is a moral choice. Scripture clearly addresses homosexual behavior, but does not address homosexual orientation. Choosing not to say more than Scripture, you notice that the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* and the Official Statement of the Board of General Superintendents makes a clear distinction between behavior and orientation. One is sinful, the other is not.

We also recognize sin as corporate. The fallen world in which we live affects us in multiple ways. Americans tend to be greedy as an influence of our consumer society. We didn't wake up one morning and decide to be greedy. We were born into a greedy world and this sticky sin stuck

to us. In this corporate way of thinking about sin, homosexuality is sinful because it reflects the fallenness of our world. Like greed, it is something that we are called to respond to by grace according to the character of God. The person who is homosexually oriented does not need a church that condemns their orientation, but rather a church that calls for a response that is in keeping with the character of God. The church should not be a place of ridicule and condemnation, but a place of love, of grace, and of redemption. As pastors, we must walk the fine line between blanket condemnation of homosexuality and accepting/condoning homosexual behavior.

Why is homosexual behavior wrong?

Homosexual behavior is expressly prohibited in Scripture and Christian tradition. At the same time, Scripture and Christian tradition do wonderfully express how God has created us with the capacity for faithful, loving relationships. Marriage is the epitome of such relationships and is described in Trinity-like language by the Apostle Paul. The love of Father-Son-Spirit is a self-emptying, giving, bonding, other-preferring love. As humans, we are carefully crafted, intentionally designed to bond in covenant relationship. Each part of our bodies has a functional form, and that includes our sexual organs. God created us to fit together as male and female, and together as male and female God gives the capacity for child-bearing, to "be fruitful and multiply." This "fittedness" is biological, and also psychological, emotional, and spiritual. Men and women are created to desire each other, and are physically equipped to act on that desire. We preach and teach that sexual union is God's gift for marriage, and through this physical act,

a lifelong covenant of devotion is celebrated. Sexual union is not haphazard and casual, but is an expression of life-bonding reserved for the marriage relationship between a man and a woman.

What about the person claiming to be a “practicing homosexual Christian?”

Scripture speaks clearly to this. A person who makes such a claim is making two contradictory statements: 1) I am a practicing homosexual, and 2) I am a follower of Jesus Christ. Which one supersedes the other; which one is most basic to their identity? If a person says “Christian,” then as a disciple of Jesus their sexuality must bow in obedience to Christ and what Scripture says about the sin of homosexual behavior. If a person says “practicing homosexual,” then God and Scripture must bow to their sexual orientation, and this makes homosexuality an idolatrous identity. For the practicing homosexual their sexual identity supersedes their identity in Christ. Anything above God is an idol.

What is the call of God for Christians who are homosexually oriented?

Remember the distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior. Homosexual orientation is the inclination to desire sexual intimacy with a person of the same sex. Homosexual behavior is achieving sexual gratification with someone of the same sex. The first is a desire, the second is an action. One may not choose to be a homosexual, but one does choose whether or not to engage in homosexual behavior. The call to the Christian homosexual is the same as the call to all Christians—to continue to avail

yourself to the transforming grace of God as He continues to shape you into His likeness. The call is also the same as the call to the single Christian heterosexual—avail yourself to the sustaining grace of God in a life of disciplined sexual abstinence.

Can a homosexual be reoriented to heterosexuality?

Sometimes. There are former homosexuals who testify to a healing grace that transformed their sexual orientation. This is more likely to occur in cases where teens or young adults are able to receive skilled counseling and spiritual direction early in their journey, and were supported by strong Christian friends. It is imperative for a pastor to find a good counselor in the community who can serve those wrestling with sexual orientation. The weaving of one's orientation calls for professional counseling alongside the pastoral care.

While we embrace the optimism of grace to transform lives and encourage homosexuals to remain available to God's transforming grace, the reality is that a transformed sexual orientation is not always the case. For those who are not reoriented, they are called to live a life of abstinence that is graced by the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

How do we show God's grace to homosexuals without condoning their lifestyle?

Love Unconditionally. God so unconditionally loved the world that He sent His one and only Son, not to condemn but to save (John 3:16-17). While Paul states clearly that homosexual behavior is one example of the worst forms of human unrighteousness, he also describes just as clearly the unconditional love of God: "God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still

sinner, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8); nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:39).

God's heart breaks over all sinners. Always remain mindful that each of the passages we referred to in the New Testament lists homosexual behavior among other sinful behaviors such as drunkenness, greed, lying, and gossiping. God does not love someone any less simply because he or she is a homosexual. It is hypocritical for us to do so. Extending grace to the homosexual begins with allowing God to love them through you. If in this we ask God to break our heart with what is breaking His heart, our hearts would be broken over His lost child caught up in the homosexual lifestyle and over His church that so often responds in loveless judgmentalism and ridicule. God, grant us grace to be Your unconditional love.

Be Available to Come Alongside In the Complexity of the Journey. Resist the ever-present temptation to make this a simple matter. Navigating homosexuality is seldom a simple journey. Our refusing to come alongside in the complexity of the journey too often results in two wrong responses. The first is to naively believe that homosexuality is a simple matter to be fixed by one serious trip to the altar. Such naivety on our part makes homosexuality a problem that we do not have to think about or talk about. When this attitude is taken, the church will end up offering simplistic remedies that compound the frustration experienced by those who struggle with homosexuality.

The second wrong response is to simply cave in to the belief that homosexuality is irreversible, homosexual behavior is natural, "just who I am", and thereby we offer no hope at all. This response surrenders to pro-homosexual rationales that are called biblical, but are far from it. The result is to push the homosexual to

other denominations that are beginning to sanction the homosexual lifestyle as acceptable, though not desirable, or even accepting the homosexual lifestyle as completely natural and acceptable.

Neither of these is an adequate response. Instead, our response to homosexuals must mirror the complex journey-alongside character of Jesus. At times those closest to Him did not understand. He went out of his way to find and associate with the rejected, the outcast. He was a friend of sinners (including us). He ate with them, accepted them, loved them and shared with them the good news of the gospel. He invited them to share in His life, offering good news to captives, recovery and freedom to the oppressed, and proclaiming to them the blessing of the Lord. As recipients of God's grace ourselves, grace to the homosexual is our availability to come alongside in the complexity of the journey. God, grant us grace for the journey.

Teach the Truth and Communicate Hope. We must not shy away from telling the truth about homosexuality, its roots and its consequences. The people of God may well be the only place left in the world where homosexuals can be loved and hear the truth of God. From Scripture, Christian tradition and the doctrines of our church, we compassionately and persistently affirm that homosexual practice is contrary to God's will and cannot be acceptable behavior for followers of Christ, always pointing to the hope in Christ who came to redeem all of us from the power of sin. Wesleyan theology offers resources of hopeful grace for the homosexual. By grace, God is able to either deliver them from homosexual desires or enable them to live celibate lives. God, grant us grace to teach Your hope-filled truth.

Provide a Grace Community of Hospitality and Formation. The homosexual needs the community of grace available through your church. It is within this grace com-

munity that the homosexual participates in the grace of hospitality and character formation. One of our greatest failures as the church is to think that a person can live a celibate life as a homosexual without the benefit of Christian community. We are created for human intimacy. We need human touch, conversation, inclusion, belonging, and care. To counsel a person in the office or at the altar is not the end of their struggle. It is a battle waged in the trenches of daily life. The homosexual has real needs. They are asking, "Who do I talk to? Eat with? Play with? Share holidays with? Celebrate birthdays with? Who hugs me? Listens to me when I am sad? Calls me? Thinks to include me? Where do I live?"

If the homosexual community offers a better welcome than the people of God, a struggling person will seek help from that community. If we, as the church, immediately condemn our homosexual brothers and sisters without taking the time to get to know them and to share God's love with them, we may turn them off from the church and from God for good. Homosexuals need the church, and they matter to us because they matter to God.

If the church wants to get serious about helping the homosexual seeking to be a Christlike disciple, we must think in terms of consistent, rich hospitality. Christian singles will purchase large houses and become havens of belonging and character formation for men and women living in God-honoring community. Families will permanently open their homes to a new member of the family. Churches will develop support groups and provide mature mentors. The reoriented or celibate single homosexual will be invited to full participation in the life and ministry of the church, leading ministries, serving on boards, and singing in choirs. We cannot expect a person to "go

deal with this and come back when you have it settled." One of our best means of grace is the hospitality and character formation in the fellowship of the church. God grant our church grace to be such a community.

For additional resources contact our
Clergy Development Office
pastor@nazarene.org



THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI