

# **A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION** ***Gay and Lesbian Issues*** ***at the Intersection of Faith*** ***and Society***

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26**  
**7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**

**CENTERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL THEATRE**  
500 East Franklin Street • Centerville

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**7:00 - 7:05 Welcome and Introduction of Marsha Bonhart by  
Rev. Jan Harry, Centerville Washington Diversity Council Chair**

Welcome! We're delighted that you're here this evening!

I'm Jan Harry, Chair of the Centerville Washington Diversity Council.

The Diversity Council brings together governments, schools, businesses, media, faith and ethnic communities, organizations and individuals to promote multi-cultural relations and address issues of diversity in our community.

Our purpose is to enhance our community's cultural relationships by celebrating diversity – whether that be ethnic, faith, race, economics, physical abilities, sexual orientation, age or other diversities -- and cultivating an environment of acceptance.

The Diversity Council is not an advocacy group but rather educates ourselves and our community and celebrates the worth of all persons.

Any resident or employee of a business in Centerville or Washington Twp is invited to become a member of the Diversity Council. Our community forums and business meetings are usually held at the Washington-Centerville Public Library on West Spring Valley Rd. You'll find Diversity Council brochures on the table in the back corner.

And you can learn more on the Diversity Council on our website ...  
[www.cwtdiversity.org](http://www.cwtdiversity.org)

Let us now move on to our program...

It's my privilege to introduce Marsha Bonhart who will be the facilitator for the conversation tonight. Most of us know Marsha as the WDTN Noon and 5:30 anchor and health reporter. She's been at Channel 2 since March of 1988 (!).

You may also be interested to know that Marsha has won numerous awards not only for her work but also for her community involvement. She received a News Emmy Nomination for her series on "Crack Addicted Babies." In both 1993 and 2004, she won the Ohio Public Images Award for producing stories that create greater understanding and acceptance of people with developmental disabilities. And in 2003 she was selected as one of the Dayton Daily News Top Ten Women.

Thank you, Marsha, for being with us!

And again.... Welcome to tonight's conversation!

### **7:05 - 7:10 Introduction to the evening by Marsha Bonhart**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. It is an honor for me to be here tonight and to moderate a Community Conversation around a very timely and highly divisive issue.

About a year ago, the Education and Program Committee of the Centerville Washington Diversity Council decided it wanted to do something on the topic of gay and lesbian issues. They felt it was important for our communal life together to talk about this issue together in a safe and informative environment. Sadly, and too often, this issue is not being talked about in healthy or helpful ways, whether that be in churches, schools, workplaces, or even in families. Too often what we get from both sides of this issue is name calling, put downs, anger and accusations of unfaithfulness.

So here we are. We are here tonight to have a *Community Conversation*.  
*The topic: Gay and Lesbian Issues at the Intersection of Faith and Society.*

We are here to deepen our understanding about this topic. We are not here to debate or argue with one another. Our panelists have been asked to prepare some thoughtful responses to some questions that will be posed to them and then present their best ideas and perspectives clearly and as succinctly as possible. They will be presenting their perspectives on the topic and will be doing so in a civil and respectful manner. They will model for us a way to engage in civil discourse...hopefully without killing one another! You will be able to see, to name and to accept the differences that are real and present among us, and just maybe your own understanding will be expanded and clarified.

Our panelists are all Christians, and even more particularly, they are Christians of the Protestant persuasion. This is not intended to be exclusive of other Christians, particularly Roman Catholics, or other great faith traditions. By intentionally limiting this conversation to protestant Christians it is hoped that we will be able to bring focus to our discussion. Each of the

panelists has a graduate theological education and is well connected to the Centerville and Washington Township community.

### **7:10 - 7:15 Introduction of the Four Panelists by Marsha Bonhart**

It is my privilege to introduce to you the four panelists for the evening.

**We have the Rev. John Bradosky.** John is the Senior Pastor of Epiphany Lutheran Church in Centerville. Previously John has served as pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in Huntington Beach, California; at Trinity Lutheran Church in Canton, Ohio; and at St. John's Lutheran Church in Springfield, Ohio. He has participated in mission visits to countries such as Nicaragua, Tanzania and Mexico. He is author of the Bible Study for the "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Churchwide Call to Discipleship." John has been the keynote speaker and Bible Study leader for numerous Synods and evangelism events throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He is an adjunct faculty member of the Lutheran Bible Institute of California. John received a B.A. with honors in Philosophy from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and Master of Divinity Degree from Wittenberg University in Springfield. He has received specialized training in Evangelism Explosion, Stephen Ministry and Alpha. John enjoys skiing, scuba diving, and officiating high school and collegiate football, basketball, and soccer. He has been a licensed pilot since 1976. John was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania is married to Kristi Bradosky. Together they have three children: Jessica Mari, 25; Jacob Daniel, 19; and Jordan Ashley, 18.

**We have the Rev. Dr. Michael Castle.** Mike is the founding and current pastor of the Cross Creek Community Church, a United Church of Christ and Alliance of Baptist congregation located in Washington Township. Mike has served as the founding pastor of the Miami Valley Community Church, a Southern Baptist congregation now located in Miamisburg, as the associate pastor of Jersey Baptist Church in Pataskala, Ohio and a youth pastor at the First Baptist Church of Kettering. Mike received a Bachelor of Music Education Degree from Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, a Master of Divinity Degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky and a Doctor of Ministry Degree from Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. Mike was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio and lives in Centerville with his partner of 11 years, Dan Carl and their two children, Jamie, who is a senior at Centerville High School and Gideon, who is 3 and attends preschool at the Jewish Community Center here in Centerville.

**We have Mr. Paul Pyle.** Paul chairs the Bible department for Dayton Christian Schools, where he has taught English, apologetics, marriage & family and current social problems since 1977. Paul graduated from Evangel College with a degree in English in 1977 and received his Master of Arts in Biblical Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1993. Paul lives in Kettering with his wife Nanette and three sons, Benjamin and Gabriel, who are students at Dayton Christian School, and Nathan, who also teaches Bible and serves as campus pastor at Dayton Christian High School. His daughter Sarah lives in Fairborn with her husband Anthony, who teaches in Xenia public schools, and Urban, a seventh grader in Fairborn schools.

**We have Rev. Tom Harry.** Tom received a B.A. from Hanover College in Madison, Indiana. He spent junior year at International Christian University in Tokyo, Japan. Tom received a Master of Sacred Theology (MST) Degree from Boston University School of Theology. He is Ordained in United Methodist Church. Tom has ministry service has included being a rural health worker in Malaysia with the Peace Corp and the Campus minister at the University of Cincinnati. He has served as pastor in 6 churches: at the Monroe St. UMC in Toledo, Ohio; Clark St. UMC in Toledo, Ohio; First UMC and Director of Pierce Street Community Center in Zanesville, Ohio; Enon UMC in Enon, Ohio; Lindenwald UMC, Hamilton, Ohio; and now at Normandy UMC here in Centerville, Ohio. Tom is married to the Rev. Jan Harry who serves with him at Normandy United Methodist Church. He is the father of two grown children, one who is in a committed same-sex relationship.

### **7:15 - 7:20 Overview of how the evening will work by Marsha Bonhart**

There is no more volatile issue in our day than homosexuality. We all approach this subject not only with opinions or convictions but with deep and dark levels of emotional response, far beyond the rational. When we speak to each other about any complex issue, we expect disagreement, but on this issue we risk something deeper than disagreement. So tonight, our method will be to share information, to raise some questions, to offer a variety of perspectives that Christians may take, and to let you decide.

During the first part of the evening, I will pose six questions to our panelists. To each question, two panelists, will offer a prepared response. They will have about 4 minutes to answer the question.

Following the time of prepared responses, we will then have time for questions and answers from the audience. If you have a question you'd like to pose to our panelists, please write your question down on the form provided and forward your question to our Diversity Council team located at the table in front of the stage. Following the time of formal responses, we will take a five minute stand-up break. At that time, you will be able to forward your questions to the table. The Diversity Council team will then review the questions and then select the questions and give them to me. I will then ask the questions you present to our panelists.

And one final note: all of our panelists are speaking for themselves as individuals. They are not necessarily speaking for their churches or the denominations they represent.

With all of that now said, lets get started.

### **7:20 - 7:30 QUESTION ONE:**

Let's start with the most basic of questions: Is homosexuality a choice or is it something that a person is born with?

#### **Response by Tom Harry**

This pivotal issue is frequently framed, Is a person gay/lesbian by their personal choice or by their nature beyond their deciding.

Needless to say there are very conflicting views on this matter, and it seems to define very fundamentally how people perceive and evaluate same gender sexual relations.

So lots of stock was put in the hope science could settle the questions, What causes homosexuality? and Can it be changed in a person?

So far the complexities of human nature can't be reduced to simple answers to these questions.

Science is seldom absolute and can't "prove" moral conclusions.

The definition of homosexuality varies. Is it same sex behaviors or a psychological sexual preference for the same gender, rather than the opposite gender?

The idea of homosexuality as a psychological predisposition to same gender sexual preference is a fairly new insight in human history from the early science of psychology. The term homosexuality was first used in psychology in the late 1800s as a description of sexual orientation.

In this regard it's interesting and telling to note that in a modern translation of 1 Corinthians 6:9 the NIV translates the Greek word "arsenokoites" as "**homosexual** offenders". But in the 1611 King James translation, written before psychology coined the term homosexuality, it reads "abusers of themselves with mankind". The term homosexuality is never used in the original Hebrew and Greek Bible.

I believe as yet there is no definitive understanding of the causation of homosexuality as the causes are complex. Physiological causations under study include genetics, prenatal influences, brain differences and hormone levels. Psychological or learned responses under study include trauma, sexual abuse, parental influence and life situations like imprisonment.

However, there is strong evidence that sexual orientation, however caused, is established early and change, when possible, is difficult. No one knows how to create sexual orientation, whether homosexual or heterosexual. There's no evidence deliberate role modeling can significantly cause sexual orientation.

### **Response from Paul Pyle**

I would have to defer to the individual and concede that some people apparently *are* naturally homosexual in their interests and desires. After all, I am not in a position to judge another person's innermost thoughts. If a man tells me he finds other men romantically or sexually attractive, I suppose I must take him at his word. On that point, it doesn't matter whether he has that nature because of genetics or conditioning. He describes his nature, he seems to be truthful, and I believe him.

But this not really a significant point. In and of itself, an inclination to homosexuality is amoral, neither virtuous nor wicked. In fact, all inclinations, like emotions, are in themselves amoral. Discouragement, enthusiasm,

frustration, euphoria, and sexual attraction are emotional states, neither moral nor immoral.

I think this distinction between inclination and behavior has at least one important practical implication. It is morally wrong and wholly inconsistent with my calling as a follower of Jesus for me to despise people for their inclinations. People who experience homosexual impulses should not be shunned simply because of their impulses, especially in the church, where we all desperately need grace from God and from one another.

However, I must add that not all inclinations lead to healthy behavior. God did not originally create mankind to experience frustration or discouragement, yet we often are frustrated and discouraged because we live in a broken world. Discouragement in itself is amoral, but following its promptings can lead to desperate and destructive behavior. Frustration is a typical human emotion, neither good nor evil in itself, but it can lead to angry words and actions that can destroy relationships. So we cannot assume that following our inclinations is always wise and good.

For instance, I have a lovely wife. I am faithful to her because I love her and because I once made a solemn promise to be faithful to her. But that does not mean other women are not sometimes attractive to me. I do sometimes experience feelings of attraction to other women, but I cannot act on those feelings, even in my imagination, without betraying my wife and my promise.

When we do experience inclinations that can lead to destructive behavior (and we all often do), we must continue to obey God's Word, and we must be patient with ourselves and with God's timing. Scripture assures us that God is faithful. Sometimes He miraculously lifts our burden, and sometimes He gives us the strength to bear it. But He is always faithful to provide the resources we need to do what we ought.

**7:30 - 7:40 QUESTION TWO:**

Biblical texts are often offered in discussions about homosexuality. I want to present two specific texts from the Bible and ask you to respond as to how you would interpret these texts today.

The first text, from the Old Testament, is Leviticus 18:22 (NRSV):  
"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman it is an abomination."  
Leviticus 20:13 repeats these words and adds to them that those who do this,  
"Shall be put to death."

The second text, from the New Testament, is Romans 1:26-27 (NRSV): "For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error."

How do you interpret these texts?

### **Response from John Bradosky**

In order to understand the importance of these texts we must remember that morality assumes a transcendent order, a fundamental precept and understanding. The foundation for the transcendent order regarding sexuality begins in Genesis with the understanding of the creation of people as man and women. The creation account confirms the equality of the sexes in that both share in the image of God and the stewardship of the earth. The text also affirms the complementary nature of male and female as the basis for heterosexual marriage. It establishes the human need for companionship. When God makes a partner suitable for him, it was also to be his sexual partner, one with whom together they would be one flesh, consummating their love and procreating children. Out of undifferentiated humanity, Adam, male and female emerge, Adam and Eve. Out of the one, two are created. (Adam's response is "she is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." The partner of God's own design was a reflection of Adam, a complement to himself and a part of himself. Marriage is more than a union. It is a reunion. It is the union of two persons who were originally one, then separated from each other and now in the sexual encounter of the marriage covenant come together again. Heterosexual intercourse is much more than a union of bodies, it is a blending of complementary personalities through which, in the midst of prevailing alienation, the beauty and wonder of the created oneness is experienced again. The norm of Genesis "a man shall leave father and mother and be faithful to his wife and they shall be one flesh" is repeated by Jesus in Mark 10: 4-9 with these additional words of emphasis, "What God has joined together let not man separate." Nowhere in all of scripture is homosexuality in any form offered as a viable option for the created order or norm.

With that as a basis of understanding we can look at both the Leviticus and Roman texts. The section of Leviticus in which these texts appear is a part of the Holiness Code. The word for Holy (hagadosh) means to be set apart. How were God's people to be set apart, differentiated from other cultures so that they could be a blessing to all people? They were set apart with laws that were divided into three major categories, moral, civil and ceremonial laws. It established norms and values, ways of governing the community and worship practices. Ceremonial practices have changed from the beginning to the end of the Old Testament because of the circumstances of God's people. Ceremonial practices changed from Old to New Testament. (See Acts). God's people were forced to make concessions with regard to civil laws as they were conquered and scattered to distant places and forced to live under the rule of other civil laws. The third section of the Holiness Code dealt with morality, a set of internal values that shaped their interaction with other people. These are repeated again and again in scripture both in the Old Testament and in the New (See Corinthians, Romans, Thessalonians etc.) The Holiness Code does not only deal with ceremonial uncleanness but the larger context of what sets God's people apart from all other cultures. These words from Leviticus are part of other forbidden sexual relationships, incest, adultery, child sacrifice, bestiality...etc.

There is only one among that list to which the Hebrew word "To-eba" is added. It is in the context of Leviticus 18:22. It is the word for abomination, something abhorrent, repugnant, and disgusting and something that violates the fundamental boundaries established by God. Not only was Israel to be

separate from the other pagan cultures that practiced many fertility rituals in their agrarian society, but homosexual behavior is singled out because it breaks the fundamental understanding of the created order. It is a procreative dead end. For those reason the penalties attached are the most severe.

Paul, who wrote Romans, was also an Old Testament scholar. He was more than a little familiar with the understandings I have reviewed with you. Paul makes a clear statement about same sex relationships for both men and women. Paul lays out a clear process consisting of five stages that describe the power and affect of sin in our world in a series of verses that begins with verse 19.

Stage 1: God's invisible transcendence and majesty is visibly manifest in creation

Stage 2: Humans knowingly and foolishly exchange the true God for the worship of idols

Stage 3: God gives over humans to their desires, passions and to an unfit mind which become self-degrading and self-destructive forms of conduct.

Stage 4: Many humans dishonor themselves by exchanging natural intercourse for unnatural intercourse; all are engaged in some form of improper and evil conduct.

Stage 5: The self-degrading evil behavior to which God gives over humans ends in the ultimate consequence of death.

It is clear that Paul sees the absurd exchange of the living Lord for idols that leads to the absurd exchange of heterosexual intercourse for homosexual intercourse. A dishonoring of God leads to a dishonoring of selves. A failure to acknowledge God leads to an unfit mind and debased conduct.

Paul uses the same base as the Old Testament writers; creation sets the norm for what is natural. The complimentary creation of male and female anatomy give us a clue regarding the creator's design. Same sex relationships are contrary to the creator's design for community and intimacy.

All of this does not excuse other heterosexual forms of perversion, adultery, pedophilia, bestiality, etc. All are clearly labeled as sins. All are contrary to God's will and acceptable moral standards or norms. All require the Grace of God that provides forgiveness, redemptions, repentance, transformation and a new beginning.

### **Response from Mike Castle**

When it comes to homosexuality, we turn to the Bible for a Word...for understanding. And the first thing we find is that the texts are scarce on this subject.

Someone has noted that there are like 376 references to heterosexual behavior in the Bible, but there is only 6-8 references to homosexuality. So who needs more supervision?

While the texts are scarce, it is important to note and emphasize that the passages and verses we do have deal with same-gender behaviors, and not "homosexuality" as a trait of personhood or sexual orientation. Homosexual

orientation is a modern understanding and would have been totally foreign to the minds of the ancient world. So we have to be clear in our interpretations that the texts we do have speak only to certain behaviors, and do not speak directly to the matter of sexual orientation and any loving relationships that may come as a result of that orientation.

Now let's turn to the verses that have been lifted up for interpretation. These verses are the ones most commonly used to justify and label homosexual orientation and all same-gender sexual behaviors as sin, and thus contrary to Christian teaching. The words from Leviticus are seemingly unambiguous. They refer specifically to all male to male sexual intercourse. There is no reference here to female to female intercourse.

It is also important to note that the two verses from Leviticus are the only prohibitions against same gender behavior to be found in all of the Hebrew Bible, what we commonly refer to as the Old Testament. This is it. They are part of what is called the "holiness code", which speaks of many ways that Israel was to be separate from the practices of its neighbors. Other laws in this code forbid incest, adultery, sex with animals, and sex during a woman's menstruation. The code also includes laws against the cross-breeding of cattle, against the planting of two kinds of seed in one field, against wearing two kinds of fabric. Not to mention the eating of barbecued ribs, which is called an abomination – *toevah* – the same word applied to same-gender intercourse.

There is a big problem in lifting these two verses from Leviticus and making them apply to gay and lesbian people today. Christians have always been selective in their obedience to Hebrew law. I've yet to find anyone who is willing to live by the laws of Leviticus today. So it just seems strange to me that anyone would be willing to say to gay and lesbian people that they have to abide by this law while they themselves are free not to obey other laws included in the same book. The truth is that Christians have always laid aside the vast majority of these laws. What criteria, then, do we use in deciding which ones are binding on us, and which ones aren't? Do we choose according to our prejudice, our personal taste? Should it have to do with how often scripture restates it with emphasis and how well it connects to the broader themes of the Bible? Should it have to do with whether or not Jesus made it his theme? On these criteria, there is little confidence that I can give these verses as either relevant, or even helpful for Christian practice today!

Now let's turn to Romans 1:26-27. Again, this verse is one of the most commonly used verses to justify and label homosexual orientation and all same-gender sexual behaviors as sin, and thus contrary to Christian teaching. But these issues are not the concern of this passage of scripture.

This text is part of an extended theological argument by Paul. Paul is in the process of showing how every person on the earth is fallen and in need of grace. In Chapter 1, he speaks first of typical Gentile sin and then in Chapter 2, of typical Jewish sin. He is on his way to saying in Chapter 3 that "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" and are in need of God's grace.

Verses 26-27 are part of Paul's focus on Gentile or pagan sinfulness. The category Paul puts over it all is the sin of idolatry. It is the sin of misplaced

worship. This exchanging of “natural intercourse for unnatural intercourse,” is rooted in the worship of the “creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!” Sex and worship were often joined together in Roman culture and this would have been very offensive to Paul, and this is what Paul condemns. But what is more interesting is Paul’s use of the words “natural” and “unnatural” as it relates to sexual intercourse.

To me, that sounds as if heterosexual people were having sex with persons of their same gender as an act of worship or insatiable lust. Paul assumes that this is all unnatural and it would have been Paul’s only frame of reference. “They exchanged what is natural”, he says, “for that which goes against nature.” What does Paul mean by “against nature”? People have answered this question by way of the biblical creation story. God creates male and female and gives them to each other. The only pattern the Bible describes for sexual intimacy and fulfillment is marriage between female and male. People have also answered by way of biology. We are physically equipped for heterosexual intercourse. In other words, the genital parts match, so Paul says this is natural. But honestly, we really don’t know exactly what Paul meant by “natural” and “unnatural.” It is instructive to recall that on at least one occasion Paul was less convincing about what is “natural.” He says elsewhere in 1 Corinthians that it is against nature for a woman to wear her hair short or for a man to wear his hair long. Is it?

But I have to raise another question. What about people, like me, who are gay? From my earliest awareness I have been drawn only to same gender intimacy! My natural inclination is to a homosexual orientation. It is most unnatural for me to desire intimacy with the opposite sex. In a real sense heterosexuality is personally against nature for me. Does this text condemn me and my GLBT sisters and brothers? How are we to be faithful to nature?

I do share Paul’s concern for our present day society and Church, which in many ways, is full of idolatry and misplaced worship of all kinds, much of which I find myself guilty and complicit. However, I do NOT think Paul is singling out homosexual persons for condemnation nor is he making any reference to, or has any notion of, the loving, faithful, caring, and supportive relationships that are established when lesbian and gay people are allowed to live freely and openly and faithfully.

### **7:40 - 7:50 QUESTION THREE:**

Wow! Some very different interpretations were offered for these texts. What then is the Bible’s authority for you as you try to discern your understanding of homosexuality?

#### **Response by Tom Harry**

The Bible speaks to our human condition thru the Holy Spirit’s leading and thru tools of Biblical scholarship, which in turn we as interpreters implement in faith and love. All this must operate to understand the meaning and application of God’s message, especially about controversial issues.

The following seven guidelines for faithful Christian interpretation are useful for positive, not restrictive, use of the scriptures:

### **1. Jesus Christ, the redeemer, is the center of scripture.**

Commentary: The redemptive activity of God is central to assessing the significance of issues always present in the life of the Church and society. This is not always easy as Jesus was not a black/white legalist. He showed us the way of love for God, for neighbor, even for enemies and society's rejected peoples. Focus on Jesus yields a deeper understanding of the gospel.

### **2. Focus Bible study on the plane text, including its literary and historical context.**

Commentary: Such focus helps you avoid your personal subjectivism, i.e. reading into the Bible what you want it to say. You'll also avoid simplistic literalisms. For example recognize the cultural conditioning of language and understand the social historical circumstances of the writing.

The intended meaning of any scripture is understandable only in its context and therefore always required interpretation and equally careful thought as to how and if a scripture applies to our own time and situation. E.g. We need to be careful about St. Paul's condemnation of Gentile idolatry and sexually immoral behavior when considering it's relevance to Christian gay/lesbian people who are neither idolatrous nor immoral.

### **3. Depend for guidance on the Holy Spirit** when interpreting and applying scripture.

Commentary: The Holy Spirit sometimes provides new understandings of scripture. Traditional Church interpretations may be fallible and so subject to revision. The Holy Spirit continually inspires change in the Church, new beliefs and behaviors. The ability to change has enabled the Church to cope with an ever changing world and reach out to new people. Acts 10, 15 show Peter and the earliest Jerusalem church changing to accept Gentile as Christians without being Jewish first. American revolutionaries transcended the scriptures admonition to obey the king.

### **4. Be guided by the doctrinal consensus of the Church.**

Commentary: The longstanding practice of the Church is to largely avoid the homosexual issue. This should not be precedent setting in light of the fact that only recently in its history has the church moved toward full rights for people of color and women. Past practices are not necessarily the same as future faithfulness.

The key is to distinguish culturally conditioned practices and essential teachings.

Because historic creedal rules of faith say little or nothing about sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular, opinions about homosexuality are not among "the essential matters of faith".

### **5. Let all interpretations be in accord with the rule of love of God and neighbor.**

Commentary: To interpret scripture in ways hurtful to people is not glorifying God. Jesus' practical test was "You will know them by their fruits."

From Walter Wink: "The crux of the matter is that the Bible has no sexual ethic. Instead, it exhibits a variety of sexual mores, some of which changed over the 1000-year span of biblical history. Mores are unreflective customs accepted by a given community. Many of the practices that the Bible prohibits, we allow, and many that it allows, we prohibit. The Bible knows only a love ethic, which is constantly being brought to bear on whatever sexual mores are dominant in any given country, or culture, or period."

## **6. Interpreting the Bible requires earnest study to discern the best translation and to understand its historical and cultural context.**

God's message in scripture came thru real people living in particular cultures and those cultures shaped the ways people understood and applied their understandings of God's Word. Practices now rightly rejected, like polygamy and slavery, were taken for granted in the ancient cultures. Scholarly study can help us discern the difference between something in scripture just because it was an accepted part of that culture and the new, authoritative message from God.

## **7. Interpret a particular passage of the Bible in the light of the whole Bible.**

The central theme of scripture is creation, the fall or separation from God and then redemption in Jesus Christ. It is about a real person and a saving purpose of God. We need to always interpret the parts with a view to the whole, the peripheral by the central.

Biblical authority, rooted in such guidelines as these, yields a more accurate understanding of scripture and brings us closer to God and one another.

### **Response from Paul Pyle**

I cannot speak for God. I am no prophet, no apostle. No visions or dreams or face-to-face encounters with God. I have no special knowledge to share with the world. And my opinion is worth no more than the next man's.

But because I believe the Bible to be inspired by God, I believe that just as my words express my mind, the Bible expresses the mind of God. In other words, it is the Bible which speaks for God.

This means the Bible rightfully claims supreme authority. The Bible claims authority over every culture, every tradition, every ideology. The Bible even claims authority over my own reason, my experiences, and my sincere opinions. As a Christian, I have no choice but to submit to the authority of the Bible. Because I believe the Bible to be authoritative on all matters on which it speaks, my ongoing task as a Christian is to bring all of my thinking, speaking, and doing under the authority of Scripture.

This does not mean that I understand everything in the Bible, or that I am comfortable with everything in the Bible. Nor does it mean that reason, intelligence, and tradition have nothing to say as I interpret Scripture. I am

thankful for a sound mind to read the Scriptures and I am thankful for the diligent labor of God's people who for centuries have sought to interpret and apply Holy Scripture.

The fact that the Bible speaks for God does not mean that I consult the Bible on every question. On many issues the Bible is silent, and I must use my own reason, wisdom and experience to arrive at the best answer I can. And when other believers disagree with me on such issues where the Scripture is silent, I must practice the deference that Paul urged in "disputable matters."

But if the Bible speaks for God, then where the Scripture has spoken, I must submit to its authority, regardless of the political or personal consequences. Sometimes those consequences are serious. As I seek to understand and obey Holy Scripture, I sometimes find myself at odds with people, sometimes even people who are important to me, people who love me and whom I love.

Tonight is a good example. I have a naturally accommodating personality. I want people to like me and approve of me. I don't like confrontation. Yet I know that many here tonight will oppose my views. I am constrained by the authority of Scripture to speak as I do tonight, even though I know it may offend or anger many who hear me, including not only gays and lesbians and their friends but also some of my conservative friends who might not feel that I have been decisive and bold enough in my pronouncements.

I know also that having not read so widely and thought so deeply on this issue as other members of this panel, my views might seem simplistic and naïve. Yet I feel I have no other option but to interpret and apply the Scripture as honestly and intelligently as I can, even if it means I may look foolish doing so.

Such is the authority of Scripture: it demands the unconditional surrender of my options. As a Christian I have no right to express views contrary to Scripture, even when, as tonight, those views might cause me difficulty.

**7:50 - 8:00 QUESTION FOUR:**

The person of Jesus is the central and most decisive figure for Christians. How does Jesus' life and teachings, and your discernment of his purpose give shape to your understanding of gay and lesbian people?

**Response from Paul Pyle**

Much is made of the fact that Jesus had nothing to say about homosexuality. He spoke to other sexual issues such as divorce and adultery. But on this issue He was silent. What does this mean? Does His silence imply endorsement of the gay lifestyle? Or at the very least, does His silence imply that this issue shouldn't matter to us if we are His followers?

I want to make four observations. I believe the last one to be the most important by far.

1. The argument from silence is always dangerous because silence is so ambiguous and leaves so much open to interpretation. Jesus was silent on other sexual issues such as incest and bestiality. Yet we do not presume that He meant to endorse those practices. If we want to craft a biblical theology of

sex from the teachings of Jesus and if we conclude that we are free to do whatever He did not forbid, we are left with what I think is an indefensible sexual ethic incapable of forbidding even the most bizarre and destructive of sexual behaviors.

2. Since I believe that all of the Bible is the Word of God, I must take the whole counsel of Scripture into account when I try to form a biblical sexual ethic. This includes the writings of Paul as well as the Jewish Scriptures. I cannot separate the teachings of Jesus from the rest of Scripture. All of God's Word must play a role in my thinking on this issue.

3. As it turns out, Jesus was not silent on the issue of what constitutes a legitimate sexual relationship. In a debate with the Pharisees, Jesus refused to get caught in the legal tangle over proper grounds for divorce as stipulated in the Book of Deuteronomy. Instead, He went back to Genesis, all the way back to the creation of man, woman, and marriage. There, He said, we find that God created the race "male and female" and instituted marriage and sexual relations along those lines: "a man will leave his father and mother and will be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." In other words, Jesus describes the sexual relationship that God originally designed as a life-long covenant between a man and a woman.

4. I think the most important evidence for this question in the life of Jesus is the way He responded when the woman caught in the act of adultery was brought to Him. She was clearly guilty of violating a sexual taboo which under the Mosaic Law was punishable by death. His enemies knew His tendency to be gracious to sinners and outcasts, and they thought they had Him check-mated. But He surprised and confounded them. First He reminded the blood-thirsty mob of their own status. They realized that they too were sinners, not qualified to bring judgment on the sinner. After the crowd dispersed, the one Man who was qualified to condemn the woman declined to do so. Instead, He said two words that I wish the church would say today. One wing of the church eagerly says one of these words, while the other wing eagerly says the other. Rarely do we hear both words from one body: "Neither do I condemn you" and "Go and sin no more." In one breath, Jesus simultaneously affirmed the person and condemned the sin. As He always did, Jesus dealt with sin not by condemnation but by moving the sinner toward healing and restoration.

I think this story highlights the two failures of many Christians with regards to homosexuality. First, we have failed to take into account that we are all sinners in need of grace. No one is in a position to condemn people for their sin and cast that first stone. No one is actually "straight." We are all broken and crooked people who need grace from God and from one another. Only God is qualified to condemn sinners, and I am glad to report that He always wants to show us grace and mercy.

Second, as we walk this narrow path, we tend to fall into one ditch or the other. We react with homophobic zeal and alienate people who need grace, or we fall into fatal compromise of principle and abandon the authority of God's Word. Neither response is the whole gospel, and neither is true to the example of Christ.

### **Response from Mike Castle**

I'm so glad I get to respond to the question of Jesus and homosexuality because, strangely, so much of the current debate among Christians is void of any discussion of Jesus. Since Jesus is central to Christian faith and practice, it just makes sense that we would try to see the matter of homosexual orientation through the lens of his life and teachings, even his death and resurrection. For Christians, it is Jesus who is our ultimate authority on God, not the Bible or any dogma of the Church.

As far as we know, Jesus never said anything about same-gender sexual activity – at least, nothing that someone would write down? William Sloane Coffin says his favorite scholarly work on the Bible and homosexuality is a 4-page pamphlet. On the cover is the question, "What did Jesus say about homosexuality?" You open it and the two inside pages are blank. On the back of the pamphlet is written, "That's right, nothing." This is odd because Jesus grew up under Roman Imperial occupation where same-gender sexual behaviors were known and common.

However, Jesus is on record against sexual promiscuity. He said some hard words to men who leave their wives for another. There are even some hard words on divorce attributed to Jesus. But we should not overlook that he was especially tenderhearted toward sexual "sinners," and he was especially rough on the righteous folks who spent their energies judging others.

I do know that Jesus made very certain that his own friendship was extended to the outcasts of his day and to the people on the margins of society; those who had broken religious law and moral law; and those whom all the righteous people were inclined to despise and exclude. He hung out with publicans, and drunks, and prostitutes and earned for himself a pretty saucy reputation as a "glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." He said to the righteous, "These people will get to heaven ahead of you." And key to his Gospel was a topsy-turvy notion that in the Kingdom of God "the first will be last and the last will be first."

By his touch and his words, he healed people. In his presence, people discerned something of God that was transforming and life-giving. He got himself in trouble when his care and concern for people trumped his concern for religious law. He welcomed everyone to the table of fellowship. It was this welcome table that served as Jesus' best image for his vision of the Kingdom of God. By all counts, he was a radical and a liberal and a threat to common decency and good order, and in my estimation, it was because of that, that he was put to death.

I have not the slightest doubt that if Jesus were with us now in the flesh, he would number GLBT men and women among his friends. And if any heterosexual person should ask him, "What must we do to inherit eternal life?" I believe he would say, "What is written in the law?" And the answer would be: "To love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbor." Then Jesus would say, "Do this and you will live!" And if you, wanting to justify yourself, were to ask "And who is our neighbor?" Jesus would tell a story. "You're on the street and you're attacked by a gang. They beat you till you're nearly dead and they leave you lying in a pool of your own blood. And a preacher comes by and sees you, and doesn't lift a finger. And a respected

and prominent Christian comes along and passes by. Then a homosexual man comes to you and holds you in his arms, and bathes your wounds and lifts you up and carries you to the hospital and pays for your care. Who's your neighbor?" "The homosexual man?" "Yes, you go and do likewise." How he did turn all our questions to question *us* about what matters most.

There is a long tradition of using the Bible for the sake of oppression and exclusion. Throughout the centuries, people have invoked the Bible to drown witches, to keep women out of pulpits, to justify genocide, to motivate anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism, and to sell human beings as if they were cattle. It is a shameful tradition, but part of our Christian history nonetheless. But with Jesus, I want to recall another tradition of biblical interpretation. In this tradition of interpretation, the Bible empowered the civil rights movement, like when the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted Amos 5:24 from the Lincoln Memorial, saying "We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream." In this tradition, Nelson Mandela found strength from the Bible to demand the end of South African apartheid even during many years in prison. After he was released, this same tradition of interpretation motivated him to seek truth and reconciliation with the oppressors. This tradition of biblical interpretation motivated the Rev. Dietrich Bonhoeffer to oppose the Nazis even to the time of his death in a concentration camp. This tradition of biblical interpretation upheld the work of Dorothy Day as she crafted her life into a model of Catholic servanthood, in solidarity with the poor workers of this country during the depression. This tradition of biblical interpretation demands that we reject any biblical interpretation that is antiquated, exclusionary, and uncharitable in spirit.

One of my passions in ministry is to call people of faith and people of conscience everywhere to stop using the Bible – our collection of sacred books – as an instrument of hatred, and malice, and cruelty and separation from one other. In the name and life of Jesus, Our Risen, Living Savior, we must reclaim the Bible and our Christian faith as the liberating story of a loving and just God, who comes to us again and again in our own time and place "to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoner." (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18)

#### **8:00 - 8:10 QUESTION FIVE:**

Gay marriage is a controversial issue in American society today. How does your Christian faith inform your understanding of this timely issue?

#### **Response by Tom Harry**

The purpose of marriage in the Christian tradition as interpreted by such leaders as St. Augustine includes:

- Procreation -- not just birthing a child, but more importantly, raising children for God's Kingdom
- In marriage couples were seen as learning faithfulness to each other and God.
- Sacramental: In the Catholic tradition marriage was understood to be pointing us
- to God, revealing God, and therefore divorce was not allowed

The Protestant tradition deemphasized the procreative purpose, and emphasized marriage as mutual support and companionship.

As I see things now the goals of Christian marriage are

- mutual support/helpfulness,
- loving companionship,
- faithfulness,
- procreation as birthing and raising children to be healthy fulfilled adults,
- and the sacramental role of pointing to God's nature as loving.

It isn't necessary **all** these goals be operative at all times. What I think is important is that all these goals can generally be met in both heterosexual and homosexual marriage and committed relationships. Even procreation can be accepted when understood to be raising children to be healthy, fulfilled persons and in the light of modern options such as artificial insemination and adoption.

Therefore, it seems appropriate to me that gay and lesbian people be married in the church.

Because my daughter is lesbian and fell in love with a woman, this issue became very personal to me. We could not have the ceremony in a church, and I was not allowed by my church law to officiate. So we rented two big white tents and had a beautiful ceremony in the front yard of our home. Guests came from all across the stages of my life, and it was good.

And yet the most important thing to me was the realization in the ceremony that not only was my daughter's choice accepted by most, if not all, friends present, their relationship was enfolded by God, accepted and blessed by God.

Some people see gay marriage as a threat to heterosexual marriage. I've wondered how this can be? My daughter lives surrounded by families of heterosexual couples and present no practical threat to their marriages. So the threat must be to the definition of marriage as rightly one man and one woman. I guess, because I prefer a broader meaning for marriage for several reasons, this idea of threat has little impact on me.

Gay marriage, at its depth spiritual heart, is about **human acceptance**, by God, society and people. I believe some day it will come because it is a good.

### **Response by John Bradosky**

1. Who establishes the norm for marriage? See answer to question II.
2. The remainder of the Biblical witness.
3. The words of Jesus regarding marriage (reference to Genesis)
4. Issues that need clarification concerning the "gay lifestyle" as some are reporting it.
  - a. Concern for what is meant by a life-long commitment in marriage as opposed to the average length of "committed" homosexual relationships. (According to the Institute for Sex Research only 10% of the homosexual community is involved in relatively

- monogamous relationships. 90% are involved in promiscuous relationships.
- b. Redefining of "monogamous" relationships. Is it true that in the homosexual community monogamous relationship can still include casual sexual relationships with others? Is it also true that homosexual males average between 20 to 60 partners per year?
  5. Problems with redefining marriage in ways that open the door to other forms or norms. Should bi-sexual persons have the right to marry two people, another man and another woman in order to fulfill their sense of completeness? If they are bi-sexual by nature don't they deserve the same right?
  6. From a faith perspective Gay Marriage is an attempt to norm homosexuality, something I cannot support.
  7. I also realize that there is a division here between Church and State. In many ways the state has taken over much of the governing of marriages. Because it deals with property issues and ownership as well as the legal issues around divorce, the state has a role to play in the civil side of this decision.

**8:10 - 8:20 QUESTION SIX:**

What we've talked about tonight is the issue of homosexuality from uniquely protestant Christian perspectives. How should these Christian beliefs play out in American public life and in the making of American public policy?

I am a firm advocate of religious liberty and the separation of Church and State. I think it is our country's most unique and greatest contribution to the world of government and civilized order. Religious freedom has made our country a religiously diverse and lively place, as evidenced here tonight.

**Response by Mike Castle**

I would be the first in line to defend a person's religious freedom, whether they be Christian or Muslim, conservative or liberal, or deeply religious or totally irreligious. And I believe religion, if it is to mean anything at all, must be freely chosen and not coerced in any way.

As strange as this may sound, I would be the first to defend my Southern Baptist brothers and sisters right to fire me in 1995 as one of their ministers. I didn't like it and it was hurtful and I certainly didn't agree with their theological or biblical rationale, but in the United States they are free to set the rules and expectations for ministers and to declare their own position on homosexuality and then determine their practice accordingly. They are Christians. I am a Christian. We disagree on the matter of homosexuality.

However, after the 2004 elections, when our state, along with many other states, passed constitutional amendments that forbid gay and lesbian people the right to marry, I feel that my religious freedom, and the religious freedom of other GLBT accepting and affirming Christians, is being denied. We have moved away from religious freedom and respect to religious oppression.

Again, I am all for the rights and privileges of religious people and organizations to determine and practice their faith as they see fit. However, when it comes to the laws of our land, I expect that they will be neutral when

it comes to religious difference and that they will ensure that every American is treated equally and that our pledge is trustworthy and true, that we do believe in American in "liberty and justice for all." For ALL!

Here's my beef: What gives more conservative Christians the right to legislate their convictions in the public arena and negate mine? In so doing, they are denying me and my family and countless GLBT people in our country equal protection under the law.

Let me get specific. My partner and I are Christians. We've been together for 11 years. We celebrated our covenant in a Service of Marriage in a congregation of our beloved United Church of Christ. However, our marriage is not recognized in the public square, and now any possible recognition, is currently banned by our state constitution. And because of that we do not have the same protections afforded to heterosexual married couples. I am talking about basic things here, like matters of property, inheritance, and pensions, and taxation, and health insurance.

My partner and I also adopted a child. We were not able to do it together as a married couple. Instead, I had to do the adoption in my name and then, once the adoption was finalized, my partner and I had to do another legal proceeding and file for joint custody, which cost us an addition \$1000. Supposedly, a joint custody is not full proof, but it is the only protection we have.

So I have to ask: Why is it so wrong for GLBT people to commit themselves to a relationship of mutual love and caring; and where possible and desirable, to share that love as parents? The way I see it, what is wrong about gay marriage rests with the heterosexual majority that denies gay and lesbian people more than 1,000 rights and privileges that come with marriage.

And it frightens me that conservative religious folks in our country have put the battle for same-sex marriage in the most succinct terms. Tony Perkins, president of the strident anti-gay Family Research Council, wrote that "the fight for marriage is less about 'gaining rights and responsibilities' and more about gaining a public stamp of approval for the homosexual lifestyle." It seems to me that what conservative religious folks fear more than anything is that gay and lesbian people will be allowed to emerge from the shadows to win acceptance from the public at large. When that happens, conservative religion loses (and this is the real threat!) its most potent weapon for rallying against gay and lesbian people: fear of the unknown, fear of a different way of looking at marriage, fear of marriage as an evolving institution.

This fear permits conservative radio talk show host James Dobson, head of the virulently antigay *Focus on the Family*, to tell 2,000 Oregon pastors that the fight against gay marriage "is the Waterloo; this is the Gettysburg. If lost, it will be like a mirror shattered. Once broken it will not be able to be repaired." What he and others don't want to happen is to have straight Americans wrapping their minds around same-sex marriage and eventually realizing that gay relationships don't cause society's downfall. When that fear fades from the public mind the foes of gay rights will have lost their war. Many foot soldiers may even wonder what they were ever fighting for in the first place.

And of course there is the moderate position that says gay and lesbian people are entitled to reasonable alternatives, such as civil unions, but they should not expect our society to grant them full marital rights. But even if the effect of such alternatives is to grant more power to gay couples than they currently have, didn't we learn anything during the civil rights struggle over race in this country? Separate but equal never equates to equality. Reasonable alternatives are just another way for the majority to grasp its privileged position even as it seeks ways to ease its conscience. The heterosexual majority in this country can state their various objections all it wishes, but in the end it comes back to power. Straight people, and conservative Christians, have it and are not willing to share it. We can dress that up any way we choose, but in the end it is nothing more than sin.

What I am asking for is equal rights, not special rights. I am simply expecting that we as a country will write and execute our laws and rights and privileges equally, without certain "religious" preferences being the determining factor. So today, I lift my voice in prayer along with Rabbi Arthur Waskow who said:

God forbid – and I do mean God forbid! – that as a country we dig ourselves into a pit where Orthodox Jews and Southern Baptists are affirmed by the Constitution while Reform Jews and Episcopalians [and United Church of Christ people] are ghettoized."

*(Village Voice, March 3-9, 2004)*

When it comes to gay and lesbian issues, our government doesn't need to take sides in this overtly religious debate. It just needs to make sure that the benefits and rights of being an American are equally distributed to all, regardless of their religious leanings or perspective.

### **Response by John Bradosky**

While we have discussed this from a purely protestant perspective, there are many others who exert an influence on our culture and who also oppose the norming of homosexual behavior by our society. Evangelical Christians, Catholic Christians, Orthodox Christians. I have traveled extensively in mission journeys to Africa, Central and South America. The churches in those countries would also oppose such action, as would the church in Asia. What we seem to be so confused about the Christian community throughout most of the world seems to have great clarity.

There are also other faiths that hold as authoritative some of the same scriptures we have mentioned tonight. Both the Jewish and Muslim faith communities would have interpretations that would oppose the norming of homosexual behavior as well.

We live in a culture that is influenced by many voices, groups of voices, political party platforms and agendas. While the concerns of each minority group needs to be both heard and clearly understood, it takes a majority of people to decide issues, elect law-makers and set public policy. I would encourage people of faith to be involved in the process and to continue to remain in dialog with one another.

We also confess that the Kingdom Jesus came to proclaim will not be ushered in by any one particular political party or the other. The Kingdom will not come because of one law or another that we establish and it will not be destroyed if we pass a law contrary to that Kingdom. (It seems to me that we may have more than a few of those laws that fall into that category already.) Legislation will never create morality. We are dealing even more with matters of the heart, conscience and will. This is the place where we can influence and impact the lives of people in ways that truly make a difference. It is in places of dialog that we can continue to learn from one another, understand one another and find common ground. I am glad to have had this opportunity to share in this program.

**8:20 – 8:25 Stand up Break**

Wow! Each of you have given us much to think about. Thank you for your generous effort and thoughtful responses.

We will now take a five minute stand-up break. If you have questions that you'd like to pose to our panelists please bring them to the table in front of the stage immediately.

**8:25 - 8:55 Q & A from the Audience to the panelists.**

**8:55 - 9:00 Closing Comments by Marsha Bonhart.**

I want to thank the Centerville Washington Diversity Council for the courage and insight to host this important conversation. I hope that this conversation can continue

I want to thank our panelists for their good and thoughtful work. You have modeled for us respectful and civil dialogue that is rarely seen in our public life. Your work has deepened our understanding and I am grateful.

I want to thank the audience as well. Your presence here and your willingness to engage such an important social question of our day is commendable. May your tribe increase!

Good night.

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