



"Encouraging transforming ministry to all persons affected by relational brokenness resulting in sexual sin."

September 2003

Transforming Congregations is "Up and Running"

First of all, you may have been wondering why you haven't heard from Transforming Congregations in quite some time. Last fall our computer system was infected by one of those nasty internet viruses you hear about, and it severely affected our ability to access our mailing database. Then our Executive Director, Jim Gentile, resigned a few months later to go back into full-time nursing. We had hoped that his position would be filled sooner than it was, but we were without full-time leadership until the beginning of June. It's taken several months of hard work to rebuild our database and get the ministry office back into operation again. We thank you, our supporters, for your faithful prayers and financial support during this time of transition and new direction.

Our heartfelt thanks also go out to Jim for his six years of leadership in this ministry – leadership that was characterized by passionate, Christ-like love and self-giving. Through his national and international speaking engagements and one-on-one counseling, thousands of men and women encountered the Good News of God's healing and transforming grace. Although we will miss his full-time involvement, he will continue to be a vital part of our ministry by serving as the Vice President of our Board of Directors.

Rev. Karen Booth has been hired as our new Executive Director. She is an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church, and Bishop Peter Weaver has appointed her to this position as an Extension Ministry of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference. For the last sixteen years, Karen served local churches in Maryland and Delaware, along with her husband Randy, who is also a local pastor. She has been a member of the Transforming Congregations Board of Directors since 2000, and has been a Bible study and workshop leader at Confessing Movement, Good News and other renewal gatherings. Karen brings a solid biblical foundation, clear vision for ministry, engaging speaking gifts, and superior administrative abilities with her as she assumes this new leadership. You can read more about her call to this ministry and her personal vision for our future in her column on the next page.

June and July have been busy months for us. The end of July, Karen and Board President Ben Sharpe attended the 28th Annual Exodus International Conference in Orlando, Florida. This year's theme – "We Are the Church" – dovetails beautifully with Transforming Congregations' mission and ministry. Pastors, other church leaders, and former gays and lesbians were all challenged to more intentionally mainstream ex-gay ministries into the life of the Body of Christ. Exodus has begun to partner with the Southern Baptist Convention and the Assemblies of God to develop practical resources and teaching tools for local congregations. Another major emphasis was on prevention. Exodus has hired a Youth Director, Scott Davis, who will team up with Youth With a Mission, Campus Crusade and other youth ministries to work with vulnerable young people before they get involved in homosexual practice. You can learn more about Exodus by contacting them at Exodus International, PO Box 540119, Orlando, FL 32854, or by visiting their website at www.exodus-international.org

The Aldersgate Renewal Ministries (ARM) "Conference on the Holy Spirit" was also held the end of July in Springfield, Illinois. Almost 1500 attendees joined together for inspired preaching and praise and for practical workshops on worship leadership, prayer and healing. Karen was able to share her vision for Transforming Congregations at ARM's Intercessor's Dinner and Pastor/Spouse Breakfast, and she was introduced at the Board of Director's Luncheon. We hosted a display at both the Exodus and Aldersgate events, and made many contacts with local churches that may work with us in the future.

Over the coming months, we will have many more opportunities to share our transforming message and mission: at a regional Exodus Conference in New York, the RENEW fall retreat in Atlanta, an Annual Conference youth rally in January in Ocean City, Maryland, and a local church Mission Fair this spring in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. In addition, we will be networking with the Association for Church Renewal and the Good News Board of Directors to strategize for the upcoming United Methodist General Conference to be held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in May of 2004.

We urge you to be in fervent prayer for Transforming Congregations. Ask for God to protect and guide our Executive Director and our Board. Pray that God would use this ministry "to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners (Isaiah 61:1b)."

Our culture teems with people who need to hear the message that Jesus Christ not only offers forgiveness from sin, but also has the *power* to radically transform broken lives so that they reflect his holiness and love. That power does not stop at the boundaries of our sexual and relational brokenness. Our challenge as supporters of Transforming Congregations is to continue to carry this message and ministry to the culture and the Church.



My Call and Vision for the Future By Rev. Karen Booth, Executive Director

One evening last September, I read a book called *Love Won Out* by Anne and John Paulk, a former lesbian and homosexual/female impersonator. Now married and the parents of three young sons, their testimonies told how they overcame same-sex attractions through their faith in Jesus Christ.

Later that same night, God spoke to me through a vivid dream. In the dream, I was writing my monthly pastor's column for my church newsletter, telling my flock about the Paulks, and inviting them to join me to pray about starting an ex-gay ministry in our local area. But I also sensed in the dream that God would not be satisfied this time with only my words and prayers, so I awoke asking Him to show me what He wanted me to do.

I was directed to open my Bible at random and start reading. The pages fell open toward the end of Numbers, which I figured was pretty safe since it was mainly about administration – allocating resources, setting boundaries, identifying leaders. But then I came to Numbers 35:9 and the section about “cities of refuge.” As I read how the Israelites were to establish sanctuaries of protection and safety for unintentional murderers until they could have a fair trial, I sensed God was calling me to help do the same for gay and lesbian Christians. Many of them, He said, have also sinned unintentionally – they are confused by the lies of our culture and our Enemy and they have been hurt by the world and even by the Church. They need “cities of refuge” in local churches where they – though not their behavior – are welcome, and where they can experience the transformational love and power of Jesus.

Through the gifts and graces of our previous Directors, Transforming Congregations has gained regional, national and even international recognition. We are well on our way to achieving official status as a member ministry of Exodus International, the umbrella organization for world-wide ex-gay ministries. And our presence and testimony at the United Methodist 2000 General Conference helped to hold the line on current Discipline standards regarding sexuality.

I'm excited that I can now build on that legacy by helping TC more effectively teach churches how to minister to sexual strugglers and their families. My dream is that someday ex-gay ministries will be as commonly known and accepted in our culture and Church as Alcoholics Anonymous.

Meet Our 2003 Board of Directors

Rev. Ben Sharpe (President) is a church planter and local pastor in Fayetteville, NC. You can find out more about Ben and his theological passions on the website he edits: <http://orthovox.org/>

Jim Gentile (Vice President) is from Penndel, PA. Our previous Executive Director, he now works as an operating room nurse in a major metropolitan hospital.

Rev. Brad Knepp (Treasurer) is a local pastor in Mt. Holy Springs, PA. He also serves on the Good News Board of Directors and the Advisory Board of the RENEW network.

Bonnie Doebley (Secretary) is from Millville, NJ. She is the Director of “Out of the Depths,” an Exodus affiliated ministry in the Millville area.

Larry and Betty Baker are from Madison, VA. Both are enthusiastic supporters of Transforming Congregations and Aldersgate Renewal Ministries.

At our upcoming Board Meeting in November, we'll be exploring some of the following ideas:

- Continue to develop goals and objectives that reflect our new, expanded mission statement
- Establish an Intercessory Prayer Team and Advisory Board for the ministry
- Begin to identify and train Transforming Congregations representatives for each region and Annual Conference
- Gather resources and package a “hands-on” workshop to help local congregations start sexual healing ministries in their church or community

A very special note of thanks goes to our out-going Board President, Rev. Tom Lambrecht, and members Alberta Ly and Andrea Yates for their many years of faithful and effective service.

Upcoming Events

More Than Words: Walking People Out of Homosexuality, a one-day conference by Cross Ministry that will teach the local church how to evangelize and disciple the homosexual. November 8 in Raleigh, NC. 919-569-0375 or www.crossministry.org

Restoring the Glory: Truth and Hope for a Sexually Darkened World, November 13-15 at Lookout Mountain Community Church, Golden CO. A Desert Hope Ministries conference featuring Janelle Hallman. 303-277-8358 or www.DesertHope.com

More information about local and regional events can be found on the Exodus International website <http://www.exodus-international.org/ministry-to-exgays-events.shtml>

“How Do You Define Change?”

“We have the Spirit as the first part of God’s promise. So we are waiting for God to finish making us His own children, which means our bodies will be made free.”
Romans 8:23b-24 New Century Version

Fifteen years ago, Transforming Congregations was started in order to offer an alternative response to homosexuality besides hate and fear (homophobia) or tolerance and affirmation (accommodationism.) Instead, TC proposed a compassionate approach that would offer the hope of transformational healing to those struggling with same-sex attraction.

Statistics from the last 28 years of Exodus affiliated ministries supports that hope and mission. 30 percent of the people who seek help through an ex-gay ministry or other therapy report a radical change in their sexual orientation. (Clinical psychiatric studies have shown the same results, though to a lesser degree. An excellent review of 31 relevant scientific studies can be found at: www.freetobeme.com/r_change.htm
Or contact: New Direction for Life, P.O. Box 1078, Station F, Toronto ON M4Y 2T7, CANADA)

How then are we to understand what happened – or didn’t happen – to the 70 percent who don’t experience radical change? Or, how do we respond when prominent former gay men and lesbian women return to same-sex behavior or compromise their testimony in some other way? Those on the “pro-gay” side have argued that it’s because homosexual and lesbian people haven’t really changed, haven’t really been healed, haven’t *really* been transformed. And therefore transformation isn’t possible for anyone.

These questions and concerns sparked an interesting online discussion among Exodus ministry leaders and a lively “round table” discussion at the recent Conference. Here are a few of their insights:

Healing from homosexuality is the process that occurs when an adult, whose primary or exclusive sexual and/or romantic attractions have been towards persons of the same sex, experiences a significant decrease in same-sex attractions and an increase in opposite-sex attractions to the extent that a heterosexual life that is emotionally, sexually and psychologically fulfilling is made possible. Accompanying these erotic and emotional changes is a change in self-perception in which the individual no longer identifies him or herself as homosexual.

I think (the word change) doesn't represent the majority of those who come to our ministries. Have they changed? Absolutely! They have learned to understand the roots of their same-sex issues, they have learned about healthy same-sex friendships, they have developed an intimacy with God that is awe-inspiring, yet many of those going through our ministries suffer with lagging same-sex attractions.

Change is the ability to consistently make decisions/choices that do not reflect the history of previous decisions/choices. An individual knows he or she is different because they now see alternatives to specific situations where in the past there was only one choice—often a bad choice.

Society wants a cosmetic fix, not a conversion. Society has defined 'change' simplistically. Exodus has put layer upon layer into the word 'change' and it no longer means to Exodus what society hears. What Exodus is calling change is much closer to what society would call 'maturing' or 'growth.'

We use the word process instead of change. We share that we don’t know how much of your struggle (with homosexuality, or any other struggle for that matter) God will leave with you so that you are always dependent upon Him. Similar to God saying to Paul “My grace is sufficient for you, for when you are weak then I am strong.” Even though Paul wanted his thorn to go away much like those struggling with homosexuality, God didn’t see fit to do it.

Though Charles Wesley wasn’t a participant in either our round-table or online discussions, the words of his beloved hymn “Love Divine, All Love’s Excelling” speak profoundly about the hope of sanctification that one day all Christians will fully share ...

*Finish then, thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise.*

Further resources for a deeper look at the issue of homosexual change and transformation:

Sexual Identity: A Guide to Living in the Times Between the Times by Mark Yarhouse and Lori Burkett, University Press of America, ISBN 0-7618-2603-3

“What About Gays Needs to Change?” by Rev. Tim Wilkins on his Cross Ministry website: www.crossministry.org/Gays_Need_to_Change.htm

Also On the Web

www.tsem.edu/Homosexuality

“Homosexuality and the Great Commandment” ... An address by the Right Rev. Peter Moore to the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh on the subject of homosexual marriage.

www.2ndglance.org

“Where Does the Second Glance Go? The Process of Sexual Purity” ... How to deal with the cultural proliferation of sexual images.

www.leaderu.com/jhs/davies-worthen.html

“When A Friend Says ‘I’m Gay’” by Bob Davies and Anita Worthen. An excerpt from their book *Someone I Love is Gay: How Family and Friends Can Respond*.

www.newdirection.ca/a_words.htm

“Words as Bridges; Words as Barriers: A Primer on Talking about Sexual Orientation” ... How to respectfully interact with homosexual men and lesbian women using “words that can be heard.”

Partnering with Transforming Congregations (TC)

New Contact Information

Transforming Congregations
P.O. Box 580
Millsboro DE 19966
302-945-9650
Email: transcong@aol.com

Website: <http://www.transformingcong.org>

We are in the process of redesigning our website and expect to have the new site operational by the end of September.

New Resources

We have a new brochure that includes our redesigned logo and expanded mission statement. Color and b/w masters are available by email or hard copy so that you can make copies to pass out to church members, friends and family.

Hosting a TC Event

Local congregations or groups of churches are encouraged to host a workshop, retreat or special-emphasis Sunday in their area, which will be tailored to their specific needs. Speakers can include our Executive Director, former gay men and lesbian women or parents of sexual strugglers. Hosting churches are expected to cover all travel and hotel expenses and to take up a free-will offering for the ministry. Contact Karen Booth for more information.

Conley's United Methodist Church
22150 Robinsonville Road
Lewes, DE 19958

Becoming a Transforming Congregation

While the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church has ruled that local churches may not "officially" designate themselves as Transforming Congregations, local church leadership may decide to affiliate with the ministry and identify themselves as offering transformational ministry to gay and lesbian strugglers. A sample proposal for the church governing body with guidelines about affiliation are available by email or hard copy.

Financial Support

Transforming Congregations is a non-profit, charitable organization – 501(c)(3) – chartered and incorporated under IRS regulations. We receive no denominational, Jurisdictional or Annual Conference funding, our ministry being supported solely through the contributions of individuals, local churches and a few charitable foundations. We have not sought membership in the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) due to the costs of membership and the limitations of our operating budget. Detailed financial reports are available upon request.

Why not consider making Transforming Congregations a regular part of your personal giving or your church's Missions budget? Please make checks and money orders payable to Transforming Congregations and mail them with the contribution card in the enclosed envelope.

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“The Way of the Cross”

By Rev. Ben Sharpe

From July 24-26 of this year I attended the Exodus Conference held in Orlando. One theme ran through the warp and woof of this gathering: the Way of the Cross. Before attending the Exodus Conference I harbored an unarticulated, smug assumption that I knew what it meant to follow the Crucified One upon the Way of the Cross. However, as I listened to a message delivered by Andy Comiskey, the Holy Spirit convicted me of my spiritual arrogance and said quite clearly: “You know nothing of the way of the Cross! Do you see these men and women who die daily to the desires and needs that seek to dominate and define them? They know my Cross in a way you will never know.” By the end of the message I was openly sobbing with repentance.

I thought I had reached a fairly respectable level of Christian maturity when I arrived in Orlando. Less than twenty-four hours later I heard Christ speak the same words to me that He had spoken to the self-satisfied, self-sufficient Laodicean Church:

“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent”
(Revelation 3:17-20)

Exodus was a transforming experience for me; God opened my eyes to just how trifling and shallow my own identification with the Cross of Jesus had become.

The way of the Cross is central to what it means to be a transformed follower of Jesus Christ. Our Lord himself declared that following him upon the way of the Cross was the essential mark of being a disciple: *Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”* (Matthew 16:24)



St. Paul exemplifies the heart cry of the disciple when he exclaims: *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.* (Philippians 3:10-11)

Here is the truth we embrace when we accept Jesus Christ: when it comes to human existence, biblical transformation is not about therapy. It is about dying. Specifically, our transformation comes about through dying and rising again with Christ. There is no other option in God’s economy. There is no “Plan B.” We cannot “manage” our brokenness through creative forms of rehabilitation and trendy treatments. We have to die.

Those who struggle with sexual sin and relational brokenness in the Church today are uniquely positioned to challenge the shallow, vapid, Cross-less Christianity that seems to dominate the Body of Christ in the western world. Those who are daily dying to the power of same-sex attraction and sexual addiction have the potential to be a prophetic voice to the Church. The Way of the Cross challenges believers from the liberal and permissive enclaves of the mainline denominations, to the entertainment and consumer oriented pseudo-spirituality that runs through much of the evangelical community.

Ultimately, the life defined by the Cross is one of self-surrender to the will of God. It begins with the crisis of Gethsemane, when we wrestle along with Jesus with the choices before us: to follow the will of the Father and go the way of the Cross or to take the path that keeps our wants and desires intact. In that moment we are given the outrageous freedom to choose to lose our lives or save our lives. The paradox is that if we take the way that seems to protect the self, we ultimately lose our lives. Yet if we take the path that leads towards the Cross, we gain a life that transcends anything we ever hoped to experience.

Much-loved Christian apologist and author, Peter Kreeft, eloquently unfolds this truth when he writes:

"Thy will, not mine, be done" is not only the hardest thing we can do (that is what sin has done to us), but it is also the most joyful and liberating thing we can do (that is what grace has offered us). A trillion experiments have proved one point over and over past all doubt: that whenever we aim at happiness as if we were God, by exerting our power and control, we end up in unhappiness, whether we get the thing we wanted or not. For if we get it, we are bored; and if we do not, we are frustrated. But whenever we become nothing, become utterly weak, whenever we say and mean with our whole heart, "Not my will but thine be done," we find the greatest happiness, joy, and peace that is ever possible in this world. Yet despite the trillions of experimental confirmations of this truth, we keep trying other experiments with happiness outside of God and outside of submission to God, thereby repeatedly selling our birthright of joy. In other words, we are insane. Sin is insanity. [Peter Kreeft, "How Does the Weakness of the Cross Make Us Strong?"]

The way of the Cross leads from Gethsemane to Calvary where there is the anguish of total self-surrender to God. In Andy Comiskey's presentation on the morning of July 25 he told the story of a young woman who had returned to the process of seeking transformation after years of an intense lesbian relationship. He related that, as this woman began to pour out her life to God in prayer, she was wracked with such agony that she looked like she was dying. Andy paused and then said, "She **was** dying!"

But here is the Good News: It is in such moments of death to our own deepest, most broken selves, that we are truly transformed into the image of Jesus Christ! Since our Friend and Savior has already pioneered the Way of the Cross before us, our own Golgotha becomes a place of unimaginable sweetness because it is at that point

we become most intensely united with Jesus Christ. The Cross was the moment of agonizing desolation and abandonment for Jesus, but for us it is the moment of reunion and deep communion. Praise God!

The Way of the Cross leads from the joyful anguish of Calvary to the undiluted triumph of the empty tomb. We share in Christ's own exaltation when we pass, with him, through our own little crucifixions to the glory of the resurrection. Moreover, the transforming power we need to live in victory over sin flows directly from surrendering ourselves in the Cross. St. Paul knew this reality in his own life when he poured out his own struggles:

But [the Lord] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

We long to go immediately to the victory of Easter without our own Good Friday passion. But this is not God's way. It is only when we follow Christ through those moments of soul-sundering acts of radical obedience that God

exalts us and makes us participants in Christ's own glory: *And being found in appearance as a man, [Jesus] humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.... (Philippians 2:8-9)*

May God grant us the grace to faithfully take the Way of the Cross so fully that we experience this resurrection exaltation poured out through our surrendered, transformed lives.

