



Spring 2007

“Love Beyond Words”

By Executive Director Karen Booth

More and more the Church is challenged by living in a culture that has sexually lost its way. And it's even more of a challenge to live in a time when variant sexuality – same-sex and transgenderism – are increasingly mainstreamed and normalized. American culture has moved from tolerance to acceptance, and even in many ways to celebration/promotion.

How will Christians and local congregations live faithfully, bearing witness to God's truth – His created intent for sexual expression? Perhaps more importantly, how will we respond to the people affected by sexual sin, confusion and brokenness? Strugglers, family and friends, even pro-gay activists?

Some Christians and churches opt for full acceptance. Others opt for hateful rejection and exclusion – homophobia. Some choose silence and apathy – they do nothing and say nothing. Others embrace political debate or legislative approaches, even if those efforts get them stuck in a “war of words.”

Uncritical acceptance, homophobic rejection, apathy, ideological paralysis ... all are sinful responses that fail to help the people who hurt. The godly, Biblical response is to offer the hope of freedom and transformation through the atoning death of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit. That grace-filled response is evident in several of the churches Paul founded and nurtured in Greece, and within a culture that was even more sexually permissive than ours.

In two of his earliest letters, Paul addresses the Thessalonians, a group of believers that struggled to understand and live out their Christian faith. The Thessalonians had problems grasping the resurrection. They had problems comprehending the second coming. They had problems with idleness. And in the 4th chapter of the first letter, Paul indicates they also found it difficult to live sexually pure lives.

The same could be said for the church Paul founded in Corinth. Yet in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 – a passage that is formational for many ex-gay ministries – Paul writes, “that's who some of you were.” WERE. Past tense. There were people in that church who had engaged in immoral sexual behavior, including that of the same-sex variety. After they came to faith in Christ, they didn't.

Unfortunately, Paul didn't leave us a blueprint. He didn't tell us how either the Thessalonian or Corinthian churches ministered to the sexually sinful. I think that's because “one size doesn't fit all.” Such ministries are birthed and directed by the Holy Spirit and specific to the unique needs of each community and congregation. But after four years as Director of TC, sixteen years as a senior pastor, and 30+ years dealing with my own heterosexual sin, I have a few suggestions to offer.

What do we have to do? First, acknowledge and repent of the abysmal job we have done teaching and modeling godly sexuality. Recent surveys have shown that kids are having more sex and at younger and younger ages. Pornography is proliferating, even among Christians, including women. We aren't impacting culture and we're not even helping our own.

But it's not enough to focus on the negatives. We must do more. We must teach and model chastity – sexual purity – as a spiritual discipline, sharing both the joys and the challenges and struggles. I'm convinced we are losing the cultural and mainline denominational battles because of our own failure to deal with “in-house” sexual sin.

Second, we need a major shift in our Biblical thinking. Yes, sex outside the boundaries of heterosexual marriage is sin. We must never lose sight of that or stop talking about it. But same-sex temptation and behavior is not the only sin, and it's not even one that gets the most attention in scripture. According to Paul in the Corinthian passage, if we've ever been greedy or gossiped, then we're on the same list as homosexuals. We just might need that reminder to make us more humble and loving in our approach.

We also might need to be reminded that homosexuality is not so much about salvation as it is about sanctification. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul is writing to believers. Their faith is not in question – it has been tested by persecution, evidenced by powerful acts of the Holy Spirit and known throughout the ancient world. Yet they still slipped into sexual sin. They still needed to submit or recommit that part of their lives to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes deliverance from sexual sin and bondage happens in an instant. But that has not been the case for most of the ex-gay folk that I know. For many of them, it has taken a long time. There are deep wounds and many places that need healing. It's a life-long process or even an ongoing struggle.

And sometimes they even fall back into sin. But why should that be surprising? Quick fixes are part and parcel of American culture, but I'm not convinced they're scriptural. Think of Paul himself and his thorn in the flesh. Think of his honest description of his failure to live out his faith. That doesn't mean he wasn't saved. It doesn't mean he didn't know Jesus or that he hadn't changed. It means he was not yet perfectly sanctified. And the same is true for many same-sex strugglers as well.

Third, we must remember that this isn't primarily about issues; it's about people. And that's very hard to do, especially when gay activists continue to push their agenda in our culture and media. But we have to get past the stereotypes. Last year on the floor of my Annual Conference, someone suggested that all homosexual people are pedophiles and rapists. That's untrue and insulting. Nor are all gay men effeminate or all lesbians “butch.” We have to treat homosexuals as people of sacred worth, seeing them for who they really are and loving them into relationship with Jesus.

And finally, we need to risk doing ministry. It's hard work, and it's easier to be on the extremes because then you don't really have to do anything. Ministering in the middle – being welcoming yet faithful – calls us out of our comfort zones. But God promises that's exactly where He'll be, walking with us and helping us.

A former TC Board member, Pat Beadle, tells the story of a young same-sex struggler she met at an Exodus conference. In tears, he told her of his Emmaus experience – how it was the first time he'd had a man's arms around him in a healthy way. He said if he'd found that in his local church, he might not have gone down the road of homosexuality.

How about you and your church? Are you willing to put your arms around the sexually hurting? Are you willing to move out in ministry?

“Metamorphobia”

By Rev. Cynthia Greene
Excerpted from the July-Sep 1997 issue
of Transforming Congregations Newsletter

As I work with gays and lesbians who are at various stages and places in their becoming more Christ-like, I find more and more resistance from supposedly liberal and gracious Christians. They are the ones who shout at the top of their lungs that we who find homosexual practice “incompatible with Christian teaching,” are “homophobic.” They are the very ones I find to be “metamorphobic” – fearful of transformation or change.

They dismiss and marginalize transformed persons – and not merely transformed gays and lesbians but transformed people of any kind. Transformed gluttons, transformed alcoholics, transformed drug abusers, transformed liars, transformed covetous people, etc. These transformed people are apparently real threats to some in the “liberal” camp.

I have found that there exist theological issues and an experiential issue for liberals when confronted with the reality of transformed persons in Christ:

1. theologically, the issues of “sin” and certainly the doctrines of the “Holy Spirit” and “power of God” come into play;
2. the experiential challenge comes re: the belief that “people are born that way and cannot change.”

Caterpillars and change

Please come with me as we look at a caterpillar. Yes, I said a cater-pillar. They become butterflies, do they not? You believe that to be a fact, right? Why? Why do you have no problem believing that the butterfly used to be a caterpillar? Were you there in the cocoon with that cater-pillar? Are you sure that butterfly was a caterpillar? Sure you are.

God says: “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”; “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.”; “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is Spirit.” And we doubt God?

We can see God’s handiwork in the caterpillar spinning a cocoon and being mysteriously transformed into a butterfly and yet doubt God can transform another of God’s creations, humans?

Sin

Here we come to the first of the theological issues: sin. I need to confess that I am a transformed liberal. I, too, used to think sin did not exist. There was no evil. And all of us are children of God. I bought into the “I’m OK, You’re OK” philosophy.

When I was in the sixth grade, the then newly formed United Methodist Church stopped teaching the Bible and began to teach exclusively social opinions and programs. So, I went from nice stories about Jesus to no Bible and a lot of political activism.

At my first appointment I preached “feel good,” warm-fuzzy theology from the pulpit. I believed if there was any real evil at all it was systemic evil and a system that was unjust.

Then God had me work as a federal law enforcement officer in downtown Philadelphia on the midnight to eight shift in the “jungle.” There I came face-to-face with “sin” ... “born that way” is right ... we are all “born that way” ... “original sin.” Wesley wrote, “inclined to mischief.” There were people of all walks of

life involved in tremendous inhumanity to themselves and to others. I was shocked and confused. I had not real theology to handle this reality.

I ran, literally, to the Peace Corps where I could do good to my fellow humans. And I was sent to war-torn Mindanao in the Philippines and beheld abominable acts done in the name of justice. I began to do something United Methodists in my generation were not encouraged to do ... I began to read the Scriptures, and I discovered God was not surprised by human behavior. God called this "sin." Wesley was not surprised by human evil. Wesley called it "sin." Ungodly behavior is sin.

Now, when the liberal inside me discovered that sin was real, I had a problem ... as do all liberals ... my arrogance fell away ... maybe I was not God's greatest gift to humanity ... maybe I was able to be wrong ... maybe I was also a sinner.

Life took on a real different perspective. I was not so sure I had all the answers. I was not so sure I was okay after all. I could not say all others were okay either. Something was lacking. I searched the Scriptures. I prayed. I sought God.

When the doctrine of sin is proven as real, then liberals lose a lot of their foundation. This frightens liberals for they have no devil, personal evil or personal sin to deal with – yet there it is – as real as life. I know. I was there ...

Yes, God created God's creation as good. God created humanity in God's image, male and female God created them. But the story did not stop there. It goes on. There is the fall. Yes, we are "born that way," but that does not mean we need stay that way.

The Holy Spirit

Now, we are to the second theological issue presented here if metamorphosis is real – the power and purpose of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin, point us to Christ, be our helper and comforter, teach and remind us, assure us of our salvation, and live in the believer. The Holy Spirit the third person of the Trinity, regenerates, gives new life, and empowers us.

Now, if God does indeed transform people, then Jesus' words re: sending the Spirit are true, and then we are not left in our old state after all with no hope of change. We can be liberated. We can be free ... in Christ!

And that is the rub with those who suffer from "metamorphobia." If people can change their natural orientation, then "being born that way" becomes a moot point. If we convince people that change is impossible and they need to just come to realize they are great the way they are, then we have not need of the biblical God, who calls us out and changes us into Christ's likeness.

The Holy Spirit's job is to transform us ... complete us ... I purport that, yes, God does love us just as we are, but "loves us too much to allow us to stay that way." (As a song I know says: "ever changing from glory to glory.")

Metamorphobia and Universalism

People suffering from "metamorphobia" are primarily universalists or believe Christ died for all regardless of our response to that or acceptance of it; therefore, all are saved regardless. They often have at best a vague, un-focused theist god or "christ." "Metamorphobic" persons tend to be heavily influenced by humanism and relativism. This is indeed a far cry from the Trinitarian, Christ-centered, Spirit-controlled Christian faith upheld and taught through the centuries.

Now please do not misunderstand me. I have no problem with them believing whatever they wish to believe (except for the little fact that they are losing the souls to a false god and may spend eternity separated from God ... which is an issue for me as an evangelical Christian pastor – I am not a universalist). However, to negate the validity of transformed people ... to reform the church into their image ... to base their theology exclusively on their own fear of the truth the church has stood for, preached and taught for nearly two thousand years ... that is a bit much for me.

“Metamorphobia” is alive and well, my friends. And those suffering with this disorder are actually leading our denomination. It is a fact that in my Annual Conference (Cal-Nevada) the transformed voice is not respected and has actually been restricted and in some cases forbidden to speak out. The couple of times transformed persons were allowed to speak, they were “bashed” – the word used by those who experienced this “reception.” They were accused of never being a gay or a lesbian. They were called “brainwashed” and “sad people.” Their story was literally laughed at and ignored.

Butterflies

Remember that butterfly? Now, if I were a caterpillar, I would want to make it to that glorious butterfly stage where I was flying free. Wouldn't you? What was required of the caterpillar was to give up being a caterpillar, which is what it was born as, you know.

It could never have become a butterfly, if it had not been willing to be transformed in that cocoon. This is what I see happening in the lives of people in Christ as they are transformed. I have witnessed alcoholics never needing or touching alcohol again (and they are supposedly born with a predisposition to alcoholism, are they not? Science tells us so.) I have witnessed gays and lesbians never needing to engage in those behaviors again. Actually going on to marry and have children and living full lives.

I ask if we are not perhaps dealing with people who suffer with “metamorphobia” when they shout down the voices of transformed people.

May this help us minister to those suffering with this disorder. May we bring Christ's light to them. I cannot back off from the truth and reality of the stories of transformed persons because others are afraid of their existence. I am called by God to witness to God's great miracles ... and certainly a caterpillar/butterfly metamorphosis is a miracle anytime we behold it.

New on Our Bookshelf

In the wake of the Ted Haggard scandal, more and more churches are asking questions about leadership accountability, transparency and restoration. Here are several good books that deal with the subject:

***Restoring the Fallen* by Earl and Sandy Wilson, Paul and Virginia Friesen and Larry and Nancy Paulson.**

Based on Earl Wilson's personal struggle with sexual addiction, the book describes a spiritual care team approach to discipline that is biblical, compassionate and effective.

***The Stain That Stays* by John Armstrong.** Founder and President of Act 3, a ministry for the advancement of the Christian Tradition in the third millennium. How should the church respond to the present problem of sexual misconduct in pastoral leadership? Should pastors return, repentant, to their pulpits within weeks or months-or should they return at all? This is a pastoral letter from a sinner to sinners, composed with gracious humility.

***Restoration Manual: A Workbook for Restoring Fallen Ministers and Religious Leaders*, available from [Winning Edge Ministries](#).**

From the Director



All you have to do is take a look at our "Calendar of Upcoming Events" on the back page to see **how much TC has grown over the last year**. A few years ago, we were listing our sister ministries' conferences and workshops as resources for use in the local church; now we're actively involved presenting our own vision and approach.

A large part of that is due to our "**Compassion without Compromise**" workshop, which is a practical tool we developed two years ago to help local church leaders explore the joys and concerns of ministry to the sexually confused, hurting and sinful. Based on each letter of the word PURITY, the six foundational steps build on each other until **leaders gain the confidence they need** to reach out with transformational love. They think about their **preparation** – what's their purpose for getting involved, are they committed to personal purity and does their church have a grounding in prayer. They consider their **understanding**. Is their worldview about sexuality based on Scripture? Do they react according to stereotypes or do they have "first hand" knowledge of gays, lesbians and ex-gays? How would they describe the **relationships** at their church? Are they characterized by respect? Are there safe places to share struggles and be gently held accountable? What methods will they use to **integrate** their new knowledge into the life of the congregation? Have they counted the cost? Do they realize their will be **trials and tribulations**? But are they nonetheless convinced that, **yes!** They can do it!

In 2006, the workshop was "road tested," refined and revised. This year, the introductory format will be offered to **hundreds of attendees at several large national events**, including one this September for African-American churches in the Long Island NY area. We've even been invited to take it **to India for a short-term mission event there**. Please keep me and our Board of Directors in prayer as we discern God's will for this effort. And pray also that He will provide the resources we need!

We want to continue to grow the "Compassion without Compromise" workshop by publishing a written curriculum for the course and training more people to lead it. (Please get in touch with me if you are interested in taking part.) And then we hope to move into Phase Two Equipping – **developing a prayer-based model that churches can use in one-on-one or small group healing ministries**.

We also received a generous gift that will allow us to produce a promotional video with testimonies and information about TC's ministry and resources, and develop a program to identify, recruit and train regional reps. If you or someone you know has a heart for this kind of ministry, I'd love to hear from you.

Our Board of Directors has experienced a lot of transition this past year due to family, health and personal problems. We recently welcomed four new members – **Bequi Blanco**, who directs "Women of Valor" a ministry focused on Latino girls and young adult women, **Matthew Thompson** who ministers with "Father's Heart Ministries," **James Phelan**, a Christian therapist and counselor, and **Rev. Linda Somerville**, a local church pastor. Our Board meets for its annual spring planning retreat on May 9-12. And we'll be hosting a mini-conference for local pastors in the area. We'd appreciate your prayers for traveling mercies and for God's Holy Spirit to bless us with **unity, clear vision and boldness in ministry** as we follow where He leads.

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

May 5, 2007 from 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM

NY Annual Conference Evangelical Luncheon

New Life Community Church, 1 Beaver Bog Road, New Fairfield CT

TC Director Karen Booth will deliver the keynote address on sanctified sexuality and church ministry. For more information, contact Jonathan Gregory at jonathan.gregory@pw.utc.com.

June 9-12

"Wherever You Go"

Disciple Heritage Fellowship (DHF) National Conference, YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, CO

TC Executive Director Karen Booth will lead a two-part workshop "Ministry to the Sexually Broken and Confused" on Sunday and Monday, June 10 and 11. The workshop will offer practical suggestions for moving a local church beyond words to action. There is also a full schedule of worship and educational events. Visit the DHF website at www.disciple-heritage.org for more information.

May 19 from 8:30 AM - 3:00 PM

"Exploring Biblical Sexual Ethics"

St. John's United Methodist Church, 300 Pine St, Seaford DE 19973

Keynoter Dr. Robert Gagnon will lay a foundation for a Biblical understanding of human sexuality and answer pro-gay theology. Contact Karen Booth or visit the Transforming Congregations website for more information.

June 26 - July 1

"Revolution: Radically Change Your World", Exodus 2007 Freedom Conference

Concordia University, Irvine CA

Transforming Congregations has applied to do a "Starting Ministry" workshop at this year's Exodus Freedom Conference. For more information about the conference, including online registration, visit the Exodus website at www.exodus.to

Ministry Information

Transforming Congregations
Rev. Karen Booth, Executive Director
P.O. Box 580, Millsboro DE 19966
302-945-9650

Email: transcong@aol.com www.transformingcong.org

Board of Directors

Ron Dennis, Pres., Pahrump NV
Bequi Blanco, McAllen TX
James Phelan, Columbus OH
Matthew Thompson, Rockingham NC

Terrence Toon, Treas, San Jose CA
Bonnie Doebley, Millville NJ
Rev. Linda Somerville, Barberton OH
Greg Wertenberger, Searcy AR

Hosting a TC Event

A speaker's bureau is available to lead workshops, retreats or special emphasis Sundays. Our "Compassion without Compromise" workshop teaches church leaders the six foundational steps for starting ministry to sexual strugglers. Host churches are expected to cover all travel and lodging expenses and to make a donation to the ministry. Contact Karen Booth for more information.

Newsletter

The Transforming Congregations Newsletter is published twice a year, in the spring and fall. Subscriptions are free, but contributions are gratefully accepted.

Partnering with TC

Local churches may wish to affiliate with the national ministry and to identify themselves as offering transformational outreach to homosexual and heterosexual strugglers. Those that do so officially may be listed and linked on our website. A sample proposal for the church governing body with guidelines about affiliation is available on our website, by email or paper copy. TC Ministry Information Packets and brochures are also available by request.

Financial Support

Transforming Congregations is a non-profit, charitable organization – 501(c)(3) – incorporated in the State of Delaware. The ministry is supported solely by contributions from individuals, local churches and charitable foundations, and we tithe 10% of these donations to Exodus Youth, the young adult program of Exodus International.

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 in the enclosed envelope. Detailed ministry financial reports are available upon request.