



Transforming a Worldview

By Rev. Karen Booth, Executive Director of Transforming Congregations



Since many folk involved in Exodus-related ministries have struggled with same-sex attraction, I have been asked many times if that is true of me. It isn't. My desires and behaviors since my adolescent years have been consistently heterosexual. In the past, however, those desires and behaviors haven't been pure; I've hurt myself and I've wounded others through sexual sin, and I praise God that He has forgiven and freed and healed me.

I've also had a major transformation occur in my worldview regarding homosexuality. For the first two decades of my adult life – from my early twenties to mid-forties – I was on the “pro-gay,” or accommodationist side. I attended a very liberal seminary, so even in my early pastoral assignments I was quietly and uncritically accepting of homosexual desire and behavior. I thought I knew what Scripture taught, and I believed it to be entirely condemnatory. If the choice was only between condemnation and uncritical acceptance, I thought the latter was the most loving Christian response.

I also thought that I knew what science said about the subject. I believed the conventional wisdom that homosexuality is genetically predetermined and that folk with same-sex tendencies were destined to act on them. If that were true, then wouldn't it be completely unfair of God to deem such behavior a sin?

On a personal level, I also had close friends and family members who were gay or lesbian. They were wonderful and loving people and it would have been extremely difficult to tell them that what they were doing was wrong. And finally I had my own past to contend with. Ten years ago, I hadn't yet completely dealt with my own brokenness or the wreckage I had caused in other lives. How could I point the finger at anyone else?

Then in 1994, God began to challenge my pro-gay worldview. As with many liberals, I gave more authority to personal experience than I did to Scripture. So, God brought an old seminary friend back into my life. Mark (not his real name) was attending the same conference I was, and one afternoon he asked me out to lunch. He'd been openly gay at school, but now he proceeded to tell me how Jesus had freed and healed him. He had been happily married for several years and was in the process of starting a family. I was completely stunned and didn't really believe him at first. But Mark kept at me until I had to give serious consideration to his story.

Many people respond to worldview shakeup by retrenching and by becoming even more narrowly fundamental in their thinking; I'm the kind of person who gets intrigued and has to find out more. So I started reading books and articles about homosexuality from the evangelical/transforming perspective, books by folk like Joe Dallas, Mario Bergner and John and Anne Paulk. That led me to Exodus International and shortly thereafter I went to my first national conference at Gordon Conwell College in Massachusetts. Amidst some of the most profound worship I have ever experienced, I listened and watched as hundreds of men and women committed themselves to finding freedom from homosexuality. Their stories convinced me that my friend Mark's experience wasn't just a fluke.

I still didn't entirely trust Scripture, so I turned next to science. Digging beyond the superficial media reports, I discovered that there is no proven genetic link to homosexuality. I learned that the scientific studies that have been done – for example those with male and female identical twins – show more of an environmental than biological cause for same-sex behavior and preference. Since I was a biology major long ago in my undergrad days, God knew exactly how to reach me using this approach, too. (Continued on back page.)

When I was finally ready to give credence to Scripture, God had someone all lined up waiting for me. That someone was Jim Gentile, my predecessor in this ministry. He came to Delaware to do a workshop on sexual healing, and there he shared the truth and promise of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Through this godly man, I heard for the first time that there is something in Scripture besides condemnation for the homosexual person. There is the hope, the possibility, and the reality of change. And I finally understood that God is calling the church to respond with something other than accommodation on the one hand, or hatred and fear on the other. Instead, He's inviting us to join Him in a most exciting adventure – offering His transformational, merciful, miraculous and amazing grace to same-sex strugglers and the people who love them.

I share this testimony in the hopes that it will encourage all of us to “keep on keeping on.” Transformed lives are what God desires. Transformed lives are what people need. And transformed lives are what will convince a skeptical world.

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

On the first year anniversary of 9/11, 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 a transformational 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. In 2002, we were awarded 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 last four United Methodist General Conferences have helped the denomination hold the line on our 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.