

On Our Treatment of Gay, Transgender and Questioning Youth

The best science tells us that sexual orientation and gender identity probably begin *in utero* and are in place as early as 2 and 3 years of age. (Confer studies by the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics.) What this science tells me is that our sexual orientation is a gift from God, not a choice. Our sexuality and gender identity are how God made us. A gay, lesbian, heterosexual or transgender teen is the way God made her or him.

Think about what we are telling our children when we declare the way God made them is shameful and disgraceful. It is to our shame as a society that about 25 percent of gay teens are kicked out of their homes when their parents learn of their homosexuality. Imagine being rejected by your family and thrown into the streets because of the way God made you. The behavior of many churches toward these children is no better. Imagine being rejected by your parents and then being rejected by your church. Imagine being told that your very being is sin, unacceptable to God and that you are outside God's grace until you change something you cannot change. Is it any wonder gay, lesbian, and transgender teens commit suicide? Some churches preach against them, shun them, and send them for so-called "reparative ministry" and then wonder why they are depressed and take their lives.

Is it any wonder that so many gay and transgender youth are homeless? Or that so many gay and transgender youth commit suicide? Research shows that worthlessness and rejection are primary causes of suicide among teens. If our pastor told us that God made a mistake when he made us, I think we would feel worthless and rejected too.

I contend that we parents and clergy have added to the burdens of these vulnerable young people by embracing anti-scientific religious beliefs over the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have driven these kids into hopelessness and suicide by our lack of grace and our failure to follow Christ. Jesus always reached out to the disenfranchised, to people with leprosy, to women, to Samaritans, to Gentiles, to everyone. He met them all with love and support.

What God has made is "good." Who are you and I to say otherwise?

It is my prayer that we can learn to see Christ in all people and that we can love, support and accept all people the way God made them. I believe that

the first step in making a positive difference in the lives of distressed teens, is for us who have so readily judged and rejected them, to first judge ourselves and change ourselves. Next, instead of ministering to or at our youth, we learn to minister with our youth by hearing from them their concerns and joining them as they grow in faith, contending with this unsteady and confusing world. Next is to pray for ourselves, especially for the clergy and church leaders, that we may learn to love and care for our youth as Christ loves and cares for everyone. Finally, I pray that we look to our young people to forgive us and to provide leadership for the future.

-- The Rev. Earl D. Beshears