

Gay Dads Building Community

J.C. Wallace

When I was asked to write an article about how my partner and I are creating a community with other gay dads, I first thought, "What do you mean a community of gay dads?" My community has typically been very diverse: straight, gay, singles and couples, a few couples with children and our extended families. Had we suddenly started associating only with gay dads once Omar and Matthew, our twin toddler boys, started living with us a year ago? Well, my email inbox has been revealing the truth. Our network of friends is still diverse, but many new friends these days are gay dads. This leads me to ask several questions. Why do we, as a community of gay parents seek each other out? How have we "created community"? And, what has happened to our network of single or childless friends?

Why do we seek each other out? Personally, I find something very nurturing about sharing family history and day-to-day anecdotes with fellow gay parents. No matter how many times I've heard similar stories, I still find answers to questions such as "how did your family come to be?" can engage for hours, or at least, when toddlers are around, a few minutes. I find the connection is around common issues ranging from how to deal with difficult extended family, how to develop good sleeping habits, how to travel with children or how to balance life as a parent. With fellow dads there's the added connection of having father-only families in a world that still gives emphasis to a mother's role in child rearing. Our family life has many things in common with 'mainstream' families around us, but there is an important slice of

our life – issues related to gender roles, homophobia, or how to answer our children's potential questions about their family and origins – that is easier to discuss and share with fellow gay parent, or with other gay dads. Another, perhaps more important reason we have sought other gay families has been to create a community for our children with families that they can identify with. At our son's toddler stage this may not be an issue, but a few years down the road we hope this will help answer some of their questions and create a comforting environment.

So how are we developing a community of gay parents, and gay dad friends in particular?

we are seeking to enhance our family life in new ways



Since we started our adoption process, we sought other couples with similar interests. We first went to a 'Considering Parenthood' workshop series for gay couples and singles with a local psychiatrist. This confirmed that we wanted kids. Eventually, we choose SF Child Project as an adoption agency and went through their required parent-training workshop. A few months after we adopted, we decided to be more proactive about socializing with fellow dads and moms. We started going to Our Family Coalition and Mamas and Papas events. We also went to Family Pride's Provincetown and Palm Springs events. At each step, we met additional gay

and lesbian parents. We suddenly found our regular calling list for play dates and birthday events included a fair number of gay parents. It was in Provincetown that we met some fellow dads and we all decided to organize a "little" gay-dads picnic last October in San Francisco. What we thought was going to be a small get-together ended up mushrooming into an event with over 25 families and several dozen people. I believe this is a sign of a community seeking to connect with and nurture each other.

With our busy family schedule and increased amount of play and social time spent with other gay families, my partner and I have often wondered what may be happening to our relationships with our childless friends. What we've found is that these friends fall into two camps: a few close friends have grown even closer as they have taken on 'auntie' or 'grandpa' roles with zest. These are the friends that were with us day-in and day-out when our son Matthew was hospitalized for a month earlier this year, or who spend holidays with our family. We also have other friends, whom we still hold dear to our hearts, whom we are unfortunately seeing less. We still make mutual efforts to spend time with each other, but can schedule fewer Sunday brunches and instead plan more park play dates. This seems to be a natural evolution, but one that nags at us nonetheless.

What I realized is that we are part of a growing community of gay families and gay dads in the Bay Area. We have found other families through various channels, formed new relationships and hope that our children will enjoy them as much as we do. It doesn't mean we have lost commonality with other families and friends, but it does mean we are seeking to enhance our family life in new ways. ▲

The Gay Bishop and The Good Book

Do We Take the Bible Literally, or Take It Seriously?

The Reverend Dr. George Regas

The prophets of doom are saying the Episcopal Church has betrayed the biblical faith in approving in Minneapolis its first openly gay bishop, V. Gene Robinson. Many conservative bishops, priests and lay people grimly predict that a gay bishop, who

has been in a faithful, monogamous relationship with another man for 13 years, will split the Episcopal Church.

These fierce opponents of approving the consecration of a gay bishop believe the Episcopal Church has departed from the historic faith and denied the plain teachings of Jesus.

Unfortunately, too many very religious people in the Episcopal Church believe that

homosexual behavior is condemned in the bible. But homosexual behavior was not a big issue for the biblical writers. It is referred to only seven times in all of scripture and nowhere in the four gospels of the Christian bible. Not a single sentence from the lips of Jesus.

Unquestionably, there are passages that forbid or deplore homosexual behavior, but the

□ Continued on page 3.

Family Fellowship is a volunteer service organization, a diverse collection of Mormon families engaged in the cause of strengthening families with homosexual members. We share our witness that gay and lesbian Mormons can be great blessings in the lives of their families, and that families can be great blessings in the lives of their gay and lesbian members. We strive to become more understanding and appreciative of each other while staying out of society's debate over homosexuality. We seek to put behind us all attitudes which are anti-family, which threaten loving relationships, and which drive family members apart. All who can support these goals are welcome to contribute to this newsletter. However, the views expressed here belong only to the individuals who express them.



Board of Directors

CHAIR

MILDRED & GARY WATTS - PROVO: 801-374-1447

VICE CHAIRS

MARV & GENEVA PETERSON -
FARMINGTON: 801-451-7955

SECRETARY

CLAIR & MARSHA NIELSON - UT

TREASURER

KEITH FROGLEY - SLC: 801-227-6720

BOARD MEMBERS

MAX & JANET BERRYESSA - UT
STEVE DUNN - UT
RON SCHOW - ID
MIKE GREEN - UT

FORMER BOARD MEMBERS

WANDA & FRED KARFORD - ID FALLS: 208-523-3786
KATHRYN STEFFENSEN - SLC: 801-485-1833
MORGAN SMITH - UT

Advisory

DUANE & KAYE JEFFERY - UT
GERRY JOHNSTON - UT
LYNETTE MALMSTROM - UT
MARYBETH RAYNES - UT
WAYNE & SANDRA SCHOW - ID

Publications

JAY BELL - UT

Newsletter Staff

TYLER YATES - UT
MAX & JANET BERRYESSA - UT
BILL & MARGE BRADSHAW - UT

Website & Mailing Lists

KIRT BECK - AK
ROGER CRANDY - AK

Regional Family Affiliates

JOAN & BILL ATKINSON - LOS ANGELES: 310-378-3938
MAC AND DIANA NIELSEN -
DALLAS METROPLEX: 972-814-8308
RENÉE & RICHARD VAN WAGONER -
NORTH OGDEN: 801-786-1322
WENDY REYNOLDS - SEATTLE, WA: 425-485-2977
ROBERT & LYNETTE GRAVES - WASHINGTON D.C./
NORTHERN VIRGINIA: 703-222-6608

Additional Family Affiliates

WAYNE & ARLENE COOPER - ID
JEANINE & DELOY NELSON - ID



Being Gay and Coming of Age in a Climate of Fear

Salt Lake Tribune Opinion

February 29, 2004

The other day I watched a woman on television cry because she felt so strongly against homosexual marriage.

"As a heterosexual and a Christian, I speak out... ban gay marriage!" She cried - she actually cried.

If you don't like gays, just come out and say it. Don't hide behind your religion and don't ever, ever hide behind God. He is our God, everyone's God, even mine, an 18-year-old homosexual. We are taught of his light, generosity and unending love, and that hate is never justified.

Now, however, it is convenient for many adults to use God not only as a shield but also as a sword.

It is hard enough that for the whole of our young lives we who are gay live with no identity. Our constant fear is driven by a wheel of bigotry. We are told God hates us and there is no place for us in this world because the Bible dictates that is so.

Every human has worth. Every child is special. I was born gay. I know this just as heterosexuals know they are not. To say I chose this life is ludicrous. Would you choose to live a life where you are threatened daily, where you are denied jobs and family? And don't tell me that we are murdered because we decided to be gay.

Even though I am an "out" homosexual, I will never be who I truly am. The stigma attached to homosexuals frightens me. I put on a facade at times because if I don't, I naturally walk gay and talk gay, attracting the attention of those who spit on me or call me "fag" from passing cars. Some adventurous ones even get in my face with threats, all because I merely walk down the street. I'm my own worst enemy, torturing myself over things I try to modify yet cannot change.

I deal with boys who dare each other to talk to me and make cruel entertainment of my orientation. They lick their lips suggestively, creating new scenarios to make the "fag" squirm.

The locker room was hell. I used to go early and change with the self-conscious boys who all have a certain silent camaraderie, changing feverishly, each hoping his own choice words aren't passed around like the Victoria's Secret catalog.

When I came out to my mother in the eighth grade, she asked me what she had done wrong. I could not convince her that it was in my veins, that it was my being. I've never been burned by women. I wasn't coddled by my mother, or

dropped as an infant. I do not know how I am gay or for what purpose. I am just an observer like everyone else. I cannot explain my position the way I wish I could.

I just want to live my life in the truest and most honest way I can. The only way to do that is to live it for myself.

Why should our sexuality be scrutinized? It is nobody's business what happens between two consenting adults, gay or straight. You can turn anyone into a pervert. It is only the kind of light you shed upon a person that dictates how they are viewed and treated.

I believe sex is personal, not for public debate. Just as there are offensive, vulgar, and shameful homosexuals who flaunt their sexuality, there are also heterosexuals doing the same thing. It is unjust to label a community.

Homosexuals who want to marry desire it for legal, religious, and symbolic reasons, not to mock anyone. It is human nature, not hetero-nature, to partner up and settle down.

It is not immoral to love. It is not immoral to connect with someone and want to spend your life with that person. If you focus on the sex aspect you are so far from the issue that you need to pick up a dictionary and find the definition of love.

Gay people can have Christian values and some are Christian, embracing the beneficial values that God offers. Why focus on hate? It benefits no one. Being gay is like being short, tall, black or white. It is something else that makes this a diverse world.

Don't tell me God doesn't love me and that I was born damned. Tell me you don't like me. Tell me you're a bigot. If God hates me, I was a waste of his time and will be judged accordingly. It is not man's place to judge, it is God's. Every Christian knows this.

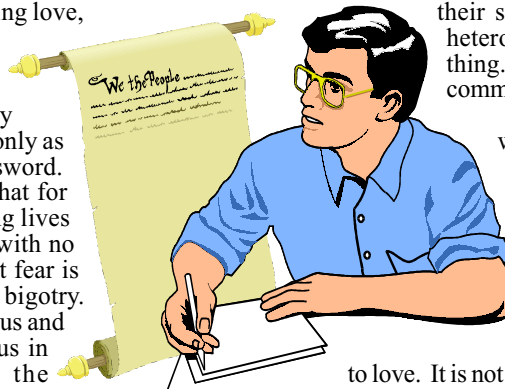
Stop holding marriage above our heads and crying that it is because you are Christian. I say give it to us because you are Christian.

The other day I saw a woman crying because she felt so strongly against homosexual marriage. Go cry because people starve, because children are abused, and because war and tragedy run rampant, but not because two people fall in love.

I cannot attribute my name to this article because I am a high school student and I couldn't bring any inconveniences upon my friends and family.

I don't want people to be sorry for me. I have friends who love me. I have family who love me. And you know what? It's not in spite of my being gay. 🙏

The writer is a high school senior who lives on the Wasatch Front.



□ *Continued from page 1.*

discussions of these texts are often superficial, in not distorted.

Take a bible and turn to the third book, Leviticus, and read it. You will quickly understand how every religious person – fundamentalist and liberal – is selective about what is taken as God’s word.

The television evangelists are always talking about the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah and how homosexuality destroyed the city. I do not know one respectable biblical scholar who attributes the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to homosexuality. Yet the words sodomite and sodomite have come to mean the perversity of homosexuality.

The prophet Ezekiel makes it perfectly clear that the evil of those cities was not homosexuality. This is how he puts it: “As surely as I live, declared the Sovereign Lord... this was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters were arrogant, overfed, and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.”

The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was the sin of inhospitality, the sin of hardness of heart in the presence of human need, the sin of injustice and neglecting the poor. That was the abomination to God. Those were the Sodomites. It is amazing how God’s judgment upon a city for its corporate injustice has been transformed into a clarion call against private

sexual behavior.

It troubles me that so many who oppose Gene Robinson’s approval for consecration say they take this position simply because the Bible opposes homosexual behavior. We should be honest and give up the hypocrisy of claiming, “I am a biblical literalist” when everyone is a selective literalist, especially those who swear by the anti-homosexual laws of the book of Leviticus and then feast on barbecued ribs and love watching football.

For the literalist, the book of Leviticus says it is an abomination not only to eat pork but merely to touch the skin of a dead pig. Pay attention, football lovers.

Let’s be honest about the bible. No biblical literalist I know still publicly advocates slavery or stoning to death an adulterer – both urged in parts of the bible.

One day a bible-waving fundamentalist accosted the renowned theologian Paul Tillich. “Professor Tillich, do you believe this book is the word of God?” And the wise theologian responded, “Yes, I do if it possesses you rather than you possessing it!”

I’ve been an Episcopal priest for more than 45 years, and in no way do I discount the bible. It is the foundational document for churches around the world. It is central to my life as a religious person. But if you take the bible seriously, you can’t read it literally and dismiss what we have learned in the centuries after the bible was finished.

I rejoice that V. Gene Robinson was approved as the first openly gay bishop in the Anglican Communion. Those who know him up close and down deep believe that he and his partner live deeply committed lives of love and integrity.

All Saints Church in Pasadena has been blessing same sex unions for the last twelve years, and the congregation has been renewed and strengthened by this commitment to inclusion. Today we know gay and lesbian couples who live deeply committed lives of love and integrity.

This sexual orientation and its expression in an honorable relationship was not the subject of the biblical writers. The really serious problem for Christians who live by “The Book” is not how to square homosexuality with certain passages which on the surface condemn it, but rather how to reconcile rejection, prejudice and cruelty toward gays and lesbians with the gracious, unconditional love of Christ.

In any event, I read something of William Sloan Coffin’s that still haunts me. In a Washington cemetery on the gravestone of a Vietnam veteran it is written: “When I was in the military, they gave me a medal for killing two men, and discharged me for loving one.”



The Reverend Dr. George Regas is rector emeritus of All Saints Church, Pasadena, and director of the Regas Institute.

Professor Gives Scientific Evidence of Homosexuality

Brittney McLaws

*Daily Universe - NewsNet Staff Writer
March 26, 2004*

A BYU professor presented biological scientific evidence and testimony discounting popular Latter-day Saint belief that homosexuality is an acquired tendency and lifestyle. In a lecture March 25, 2004, William Bradshaw, a professor of micro and molecular biology, discussed evidence that homosexuality is a result of biological orientation.

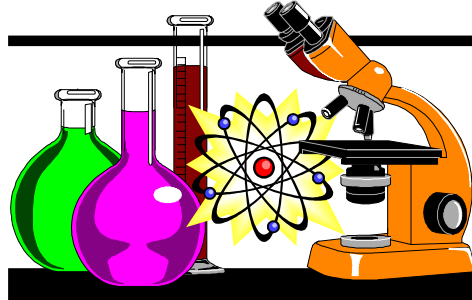
“Biology absolutely has a role in causing homosexuality,” Bradshaw said. To prove his statements, Bradshaw offered various scientific data ranging from clinical evidence, brain anatomy, birth order and genetic studies. Bradshaw presented results of these studies that link biological and environmental conditions to homosexuality.

According to a study on handedness in the Psychological Bulletin, homosexuals are more likely to be left-handed than heterosexuals. “There is a clear correlation between homosexuality and non-right-handedness,” Bradshaw said. The statistics show that homosexual individuals have a 39 percent greater probability of being left-handed than right-handed.

Other studies show homosexual men go through puberty significantly earlier than heterosexual men, homosexuality in men is

linked with having at least two or three older brothers and lastly, finger length in homosexual women is increasingly masculinized.

After stating the causal effect of biology and homosexuality, Bradshaw spoke candidly about his personal convictions concerning his “Latter-day Saint brothers and sisters” who struggle with homosexuality. “My gay brothers and sisters would say at this point in the lecture, ‘Brother Bradshaw, we could have told you that before you did all of those experiments because our life experiences show us this relationship. Homosexuality is not a lifestyle we chose,’” Bradshaw said.



He expressed his deep concern about the harmful opinions and actions of the LDS community. “In our LDS community there is not much discourse on this issue,” Bradshaw said. When there is, it is “not usually civil and it’s not always informed.”

Bradshaw said the LDS community must reach out and include those who suffer with homosexuality because no encouraging evidence suggests the possibility of behavioral

and biological changes. The traditional means to overcome homosexuality include therapy, psychoanalysis, hypnosis, group therapy and religious group therapy.

Bradshaw said many of those people who have experienced success with these methods for a period eventually revert to homosexual tendencies. He said it is virtually impossible for these people to change their orientation, despite their righteous lifestyle.

Bradshaw referred to an article in the “Ensign” that says the atonement is a sufficient means to resolve the problems of this world. Bradshaw said though he is absolutely committed to the atonement of Jesus Christ, he feels this attitude is detrimental to those who will suffer with homosexuality for the remainder of their lives.

Bradshaw said there are 132,200 gay members of the LDS church, or six members in every ward. Consequently, homosexuality affects 500,000 Latter-day Saints who have gay family members. Bradshaw said he hopes the LDS community will change its attitudes towards homosexuality and spend some time worrying about those 130,000 members of the church.

Bradshaw’s lecture and statements left an impression on many students. “He made a lot of good points,” said Tim Fife, a neuroscience major from Merced, Calif. “I definitely think the LDS community needs to look at this more closely instead of rejecting homosexuals. But we need to give heed to the counsel of the prophets and hopefully we can receive some understanding.”

Intolerance Taking Minds off Real Issues

Walter Cronkite

The forthcoming presidential election will be decided on several issues of profound importance to the nation's future.

It is unfortunate that the debates about them will be confounded by a religious issue that does not belong on the political agenda. The issue is that of same-sex marriage.

A majority of our people identify themselves as Christian, and many of the faithful believe that they have received the word of God and have a mission to pass it on to those who do not believe with the same fervor as themselves. Their faith is admirable: Indeed, this might be a better world if we all obeyed our religious lessons with similar devotion.

But that, of course, is not the case. And the zealots who follow the leadership of the so-called religious right are, in their zeal, threatening us with an ugly religious war, fought on the battleground of the presidential election.

The zealots are determined to make a political issue of their conviction that same-sex marriages are so immoral as to threaten the well-being of the nation, if not civilization itself. The more fanatical among them even claim that same-sex marriages would encourage homosexuality to the degree that the nation's birthrate would be endangered. They also fear that children adopted by same-sex couples will choose to follow the lifestyle of their adoptive parents and thus perpetuate even exacerbate, what they see as the "problem" of homosexuality.

Whatever the unlikelihood of their more drastic fears coming to pass, the CCR (the Conservative Christian Right) is entitled to its beliefs and – utilizing our constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech, press and religion – pursue its determination to criminalize same-sex marriage even though, if successful, it faces the generally accepted impossibility of legislating moral behavior.

There are many of us Christians who recall our Sunday-school teachers and later our ministers dwelling upon the sympathy and respect – indeed, the tolerance – for others that, they taught, was basic to our Christian religion. As the prophet Isaiah summed up this need for tolerance: "Come let us reason together."

Who believe this are compelled to ask: Where is the tolerance, where is the Christian spirit in the effort to criminalize the personal choices of our fellow citizens, personal choices that do not physically threaten others?

Where is the Christian tolerance in the conceit of those Christian leaders who dare suggest that they alone can be trusted to properly interpret the lessons of their Bible, and who would impose that belief on this nation's highly diverse people by threatening to throw them in jail if they don't agree with the CCR's version of God's wishes?

Besides wishing to criminalize individual behavior, the more radical members of the Christian right would like their proposed federal law to dictate what individual churches could do in regard to recognizing or performing same-sex marriages. This is another abomination. Shouldn't that decision be made by the individual church or denomination? What possible excuse is there for government intervention in this decision except an unreasonable, unchristian intolerance for freedom of worship?

Where is the Christian tolerance in those right-wing Christian leaders who would impose their religious beliefs on the entire diverse population of the United States, even to the extent of a Constitutional amendment curtailing our rights of religious freedom?

Scientists Counter Bush View Families Varied, Say Anthropologists

Charles Burress

SF Chronicle - Chronicle Staff Writer
February 27, 2004

The primary organization representing American anthropologists criticized President Bush's proposed constitutional ban on same-sex marriage... and gave a failing grade to the president's understanding of human cultures.

"The results of more than a century of anthropological research on households, kinship relationships and families, across cultures and through time, provide no support whatsoever for the view that either civilization or viable social orders depend upon marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution," said the executive board of the 11,000-member American Anthropological Association.

Bush has cast the union between male and female as the only proper form of marriage, or what he called in his State of the Union address "one of the most fundamental, enduring institutions of our civilization."

American anthropologists say he's wrong. "Rather, anthropological research supports the conclusion that a vast array of family types, including families built upon same-sex partnerships, can contribute to stable and humane societies," the association's statement said, adding that the executive board "strongly opposes a constitutional amendment limiting

For more information about
Family Fellowship write to:
1763 North 1500 East
Provo, UT 84604
Phone: (801) 374-1447
<http://ldsfamilyfellowship.org>

As the CCR leadership presses this matter, which they depict as a moral issue, they will threaten a religious war that will split our nation at a time in our lives when unity would be helpful in attacking far more critical problems on which the future of our nation depends – our foreign policy, the economy, education, medical care and the environment, to name a few.

In the difficult days ahead, the tolerant among us – Republican, Democratic or Independent, Christian, Muslim, Jewish or nonbeliever – are going to have to try to preach another morality, and that is the morality of tolerance. 🙏

marriage to heterosexual couples."

The statement was proposed by Dan Segal, a professor of anthropology and history from Pitzer College in Claremont (Los Angeles County), who called Bush's conception of the history of marriage "patently false."

"If he were to take even the first semester of anthropology, he would know that's not true," said Segal, a member of the anthropological association's Executive Committee.

Ghita Levine, communications director for the association, said the issue struck a nerve in the profession.

"The feel strongly about it because they are the people who study the culture through time and across the world," she said. "The are the people who know what cultures consist of."

Segal pointed to "sanctified same-sex unions in the fourth century in Christianity" and to the Greeks and Romans applying the concept of marriage to same-sex couples, not to mention the Native American berdache tradition in which males married males.

UC Berkeley anthropologist Laura Nader, an expert in anthropology and the law who played no role in drawing up the association's statement, called it a "correct assessment."

Nader, who is an association member, said Bush's proposal "serves the views of the religious right, and that has to do with getting votes." 🙏

Copyright 2004 SF Chronicle

Volunteers Who Wish to Help Family Fellowship

Several folks have contacted Family Fellowship wondering what they can do to help. We encourage you to submit your personal stories of your experiences with gay and lesbian family members for inclusion in upcoming issues of Reunion. As in any publication, articles may be edited for length, grammar and content. However, every attempt is made to preserve the originality of each article. Please send your articles to either Max and Janet Berryessa at jberryessa@qwest.net - fax to 801-373-2830 or Bill and Marge Bradshaw at groverclan@aol.com - address: 879 East 400 South, Orem, UT 84097.