

Parents Flag/Detroit
Parents & friends of Lesbians & Gays

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AUGUST 1986 NEWSLETTER

Next Meeting.....10 August 1986
2pm - 5pm
Lutheran Church of the Master
3333 Coolidge Road
Troy, Michigan

Meetings every second Sunday of the month, same time and place.

August meeting will be a sharing meeting. It will be a time for everyone to share their feelings and thoughts if you want or a time to listen.

At our July meeting Sr. Marilyn Bergt spoke about what the Bible does and does not say about homosexuality. She commented on the most often quoted passages and answered many questions.

QUOTE....

Comments by Marguerite Kelly in a recent syndicated "Family Almanac" column in Newsday: She found it "abundantly clear that teenage homosexuals --boys and girls -- need one attribute above all others: courage. To grow up different, and to know it, is very hard... Few gay teenagers dare to tell their families until they leave home for fear of losing their approval... It hurts children to grow up gay and it keeps on hurting until they can admit it to the people they love best: their families." She concluded "What matters most is how the family and the child handle the situation. Homosexuals deserve the same unconditional love from their parents as any other children..." NYC February 1986

Emma will be our representative to Michigan Organization of Human Rights (MOHR). Sharlet and Pete marched in the Chicago Ill. Gay Pride Parade with their sign "We Love Our Children, P-FLAG Detroit".

We listen, we hurt, we cope and we understand. We reach for help and we return it for others -- all this we do as parents.

Families of gays seen as valuable supports

By Dawn Bennett
Special to the Monitor

LOS ANGELES — Gay male couples need families as much as heterosexual couples do, Helena M. Carlson of Lewis and Clark College told attendees at a convention symposium on parental support of gay children.

"The human need for support and love is exactly the same," said Carlson, who has a gay son. Without such family support, she said, gay men often invent their own families by turning to close gay male friends for support.

The recent symposium represents a new focus for parents of gay and lesbian children, said Terry S. Gock, symposium chair and a psychologist at South Bay Mental Health Services in Los Angeles. Previous discussions have concentrated on the role of parents of gay and lesbian children in the psychoanalytic development of their children with respect to their sexual orientation.

Such emphasis has led to much unnecessary suffering on the part of parents of gays and lesbians, Gock said.

A study presented by Vincent Sofia of the Western Graduate School of Psychology in Palo Alto exemplifies the recent change in emphasis. For his dissertation, Sofia studied the effects of family support on gay male mateships.

Sofia identified partners from 61 gay male mateships in the San Francisco Bay area in early 1983 as respondents for questionnaires. Most respondents were white, middle-class and well-educated. They ranged in age from 23 to 65, and most reported no religious affiliation.

The questionnaires included a social support questionnaire, designed to examine respondents' social support and acceptance from family and close gay male friends, and an adaptation of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, which is meant to provide a measure of overall dyadic adjustment.

Social networks

Sofia found that parents and family members have a powerful influence on the emotional functioning of a gay couple, much the same as with heterosexual couples.

Parents tend to be 'in the closet,' too.

Questionnaire respondents considered first their gay male friends, and then their biological families, as their two most important social network groups. Next in importance, in descending order, were heterosexual female friends, heterosexual male friends/colleagues at work, lover's families, and lesbian friends.

Respondents were family-oriented in their interactions with close gay male friends, Sofia said. Eighty-four percent considered some of their close friends as family, and many respondents spent major holidays with these friends just as often as with their family of origin.

Results of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale showed that family social support was not a good predictor of a gay male's adjustment. The relationship between social support and adjustment varied according to type of support behavior, source of support and demographics.

This lack of stronger support for the hypothesis that families have a powerful role in the emotional adjustment of a gay male involved in a gay mateship could be explained by the nature of the sample, Sofia said. In comparison to other studies, most respondents had unusually high levels of dyadic adjustment, and the sample could have been skewed in the direction of the well-adjusted, he said.

Age of respondent was the only measure that significantly predicted overall adjustment, Sofia said. The older the subject, the more likely he was to be well-adjusted.

Sofia also found that the longer families had been aware of their gay male's mateship, the more accepting they were.

"This suggests that families may become more accepting of their family member's mateship after they have had the opportunity for cognitive restructuring of what are usually negative initial reactions," Sofia said. "Working through guilt and homophobic attitudes and disaffirming the myths about gay life styles are not easy matters for most gay males, [much] less for their families."

That finding led Sofia and other panel members to recommend that gay and lesbian children "come out" or disclose themselves as early as possible to their parents. "Parents do need space and time to come to grips with the realization [that a child is gay]," Sofia said.

Dealing with a child's sexuality is difficult even if the children are heterosexual, said Carlson. "Add homosexuality to it and you get a double whammy."

Parental closets

Parents may deny that a child is homosexual and refuse to discuss it, she said. They often feel fear, guilt and shame, as well as helplessness, anger and depression.

Because of these feelings, Carlson said, parents tend to be "in the closet" too. "They get punished in many ways we don't think about."

"For example," Carlson explained, "when a gay son or lesbian daughter acquires a new same-sex friend, you're a mother- or father-in-law. But you can't go around town and say, 'I have a son-in-law, and he's a hunk,' or 'I have a daughter-in-law, and she's charming.'"

But by hiding the fact that they have a homosexual child, Carlson said, parents often experience the same pain their children felt when they were hiding their sexual orientation.

Contact with other parents of gay and lesbian children can be vital at the time of a child's disclosure, said Adele Starr, founding member and president of the Federation of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Starr is the mother of four sons, one of whom is gay, and one daughter.

Addressing the need for parent groups to augment professional counseling that is available, Starr said, "nothing can take the place of parent-to-parent peer counseling." Having the chance to talk with another family about their gay children was a turning point for her, Starr said.

But the discussion must also take place within a wider audience. Panelists agreed that greater acceptance by society will ease the pain of disclosure both for lesbians and gays and for their parents.

"Our ultimate goal," said Starr, "is to put ourselves out of business — that having a gay son or lesbian daughter will make no more difference than being left-handed." ■