



RAINBOW-NAC

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual Christians in the New Apostolic Church

Gay and New Apostolic —

A Contradiction?

A Brochure for Ministers in the New Apostolic Church

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Rainbow-NAC is the international organization of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual Christians within the New Apostolic Church. The group is working toward support and tolerant behavior toward people in special life situations within all congregations. Based on a mutual trust, Rainbow is in continuing dialogue with the Church.

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Introduction

Dear Ministers,

When a young brother or sister in faith asks you for guidance or intercession, it's a sign of deep trust in your ministry and you. This brochure has therefore been written for those of you who are asked to help a brother or sister with initial questions about sexual orientation. Gay brothers and sisters wrote it, and it claims neither theological nor scientific completeness. We hope this brochure will help you to better understand the situations and needs of the congregants entrusted into your care to effectively minister to them.

Loneliness is a significant problem of an adolescent realizing that they are gay. The only escape from this is to open one's soul to someone, but whom can they really confide in? Whether it's a friend, a minister, a parent, a sibling, an institution offering psychological help, or someone else, is mainly a question of trust and confidence. Questions that come up while "coming out of the closet" are closely related to the degree that one has tried to deal with their situation. "Coming out" is usually characterized by various stages which we will try to subsequently explain.

Contrary to what one thinks about "homosexuality", being gay is much more about loving someone than it is about sexuality. Love is the core of being gay, just as love is the core of any relationship between a man and a woman. It is the wish of being close to someone, to share everything and to care for each other. It is this wonderful feeling every human being is looking for that is also the center of a gay relationship.

If you have any questions, please send us an e-mail. We'll try to help within our limits to fulfill your duties related to this topic within the congregations.

All our best wishes and heartfelt greetings,

Your brothers and sisters from Rainbow-NAC

The New Apostolic Church and Homosexuality

Prior to explaining the specific situations of gay Christians, particularly members of the Church, it would be helpful to look at some basic questions about being a gay Christian. You'll find some answers to general questions on being gay and other issues on our Website at:

www.rainbow-nac.org

The Current Official Position of the NAC on Homosexuality

The position of the Church on homosexuality is not static. Since Chief Apostle Urwyler changed the relevant regulations for Holy Communion, the Church is trying to include gay, lesbian, and bisexual brothers and sisters, and to include them within the communion.

The last position issued in January 2005 says that the New Apostolic Church deems practiced homosexuality "to be unacceptable". This is the reason that brothers and sisters who live in a homosexual relationship are barred from discharging ministerial and teaching duties within the Church. Furthermore, the Church also stresses that it is solely for God to determine whether a person acquires guilt before God through the practice of his or her homosexuality. It is specifically stated that sexual orientation is not to have any relevance in the pastoral care of affected brothers, sisters or their families.

Chief Apostle Leber spoke at length about the topic of homosexuality during an interview in "Our Family" (Edition 23, December 2006) and thereby clarified that homosexuality represented neither an illness nor a sin. It is instead a special disposition similar to the differentiation of right- and left-handed people.

No gay, lesbians, or bisexuals would be kept from reaching the goal of our faith or to achieve worthiness because of his or her sexual orientation. The Church's recommendation that homosexuals not be allowed to discharge ministerial and teaching duties had only been the result of an intention to protect them within the congregation.

This indicates that the attitude of the church is gradually changing. Of course, not all of our wishes were fulfilled, but we perceive that there are developments in the right direction.

Acceptance of Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals within the NAC

Many of us have found help and support within the congregations. Be it loving, understanding brothers and sisters in faith, be it a youth leader who takes his time to listen and offer guidance, be it a rector who builds bridges, or be it an encouraging statement of a senior member of the Church administration – on many occasions we have experienced an unconditional, inclusive love of our New Apostolic brethren.

The most important aspect of that support was prayer and encountering the all-embracing love of our Heavenly Father in our soul. As a result, many fears were removed. Love and courage were planted in our hearts. Unfortunately, there have been other negative experiences that caused many of our fellow gay, lesbian, and bisexual brothers and sisters to leave the Church.

Stages of Coming Out

The process of coming out is accomplished in successive stages. Some did all of them within a quarter of a year. For others it took more than 10 years. Some didn't complete all of them, but stopped somewhere in between and do not live openly gay, trying to hide their identity.

We attempted to define these stages in order to make the process easier to understand.

If you want to support those who ask for your help, it is important to know that each of these stages is linked to typical questions which require acute, finger-tip sensitivity.

Undefined Subconscious Awareness

"Really, women aren't as interesting to me as men."

"This guy is fascinating."

"Strange that it's always men I look at and not women, but this must be some aspect of puberty and will surely change with time."

These and other thoughts may occur every now and then, but never really get to the level of conscious awareness. Almost every gay man can remember such a time in retrospect.

What can you do during this stage? Show the brethren that they are loved no matter who or what they are. If this undefined subconscious awareness is only a temporary phase within their development, there's no harm done. If an adolescent is sure that "I am loved no matter who I am", it's a positive affirmation of coping with their identity.

Suppression

Eventually this subconscious awareness will be replaced by a conscious awareness that there is “something wrong”. Many of us in this stage pray, “Dear Lord, please help me not to be gay,” or they try to run away from these thoughts by

- focusing obsessively on education or work
- practicing sports excessively
- avoiding any situation of calmness and rest when ponderous thoughts occur

In this situation, some start dating the opposite sex without a heartfelt desire or conviction. A false refuge in a pretended heterosexual relationship is not uncommon, especially in cases where there is a high level of prejudice against being gay and where the expectations of family are high to find a “normal” partner.

This stage is extremely burdensome because one wants to run away from something that’s within. Denial is no longer possible and running away is also no way out. Self-doubt, perception of guilt and despair are permanent states of mind in this stage, and may lead to clinical depression, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicides or suicide.

What can you do during this stage? There are often no outward signs of the inner turmoil going on deep within the brothers and sisters. Unless they ask for help, there is nothing you can “do” about it. Withdrawal and introversion are sometimes signs. What is desperately needed is having a sensitive and understanding heart, praying for them, and always be open and available to them.

Admitting to Oneself “I’m gay”

Often it takes a long time before one can admit “I’m gay”. When one reads coming out statistics, one gets an idea of how long it might take. It’s not obvious who’s gay, and many can’t come to terms with their sexual orientation. No one can imagine what mental anguish these brothers and sisters have to endure.

For those who start to accept themselves as who they are, the next question is, “Now what should I do about it?”

A supernatural willpower is needed to lead a totally celibate life. We can’t deny that this might be possible. Roman Catholic priests, for example, are in quite the same situation, but the difference is they chose celibacy of their own free will. Notwithstanding, it requires an enormous amount of self-denial to follow this path. Could you imagine leading a life of celibacy without the love and care of your wife just because the Church or your priest asks you to?

If a life of celibacy and all the implied consequences is not a path one can follow, there is the option of “staying in the closet” and satisfying whatever cannot be suppressed outside a partnership. Some gay people lead this life, and we cannot cast judgment. Walk a mile in their shoes. What would you do if you felt outcast and lonely, and feared being despised by your contemporaries if they knew? Obviously, this is not an option anyone should recommend to someone who lives in Christ.

The remaining options then are those of a relationship with either a man or a woman.

The option of a relationship between a gay man and a heterosexual woman (or a gay woman and a heterosexual man) can either begin through mutual consent or without. In the first case, a marriage of convenience, an unholy farce, is the decision of two self-responsible adult humans, and as such, should be accepted as an act of free will. In the second case, there is a unilateral ignorance or denial of the true situation. It can be found if a gay man enters a marriage before he admits to himself he’s gay, or the

knowledge is present and he deludes himself to believe that by entering a conventional relationship, "being gay will go away".

These are not hypothetical scenarios, but are found within NAC congregations. There are no suggestions of how to deal with such situations, however; doesn't the well-meant advice and pressure to find a partner of the opposite sex, which is considered godly, lead directly to these situations? Family, friends, society and the Church bear accountability.

The remaining option is an openly gay relationship. Even if this relationship is not socially accepted everywhere, it is nevertheless the expression of deeply felt love between two adult human beings.

First Confidants

The first attempts to confide in someone are coupled with astronomical fears. Many gays admit they had no one to confide in once they had accepted themselves as gay. For others, it was a good friend, a teacher or a sibling. For some, it was the priest in charge of the youth or a caring rector who was the first human to know.

Two key aspects dominate these first talks: trust and uncertainty. Trust, that the one I talk to will understand and be able to help me, and uncertainty about the current situation, whether or not the trust is real. Questions such as, "Will I still be loved once it is known," or, "What if the one I want to confide in can't handle it," or the worst case scenario, which is, "Will I be denounced and my confidence betrayed," are genuine fears in the hearts of those who seek someone to talk to.

Friends, Brothers, and Sisters

Anyone who has good friends or loving brothers or sisters are blessed in this phase of coming out. People of one's own age usually show a higher tolerance for being gay, but there are exceptions. Most often, the best friend knows years before anyone else and is the most reliable source of support.

Coming Out Groups

If someone doesn't have friends or a sibling to confide in, they may try to go to a coming out group. Those who have a healthy self-confidence often will find this way by themselves. For those who don't, you may want to support them by very simple means – help them inquire and find a support group. It is so much easier for someone who isn't personally involved to do this research. If you are working on this, you can also inquire about details of what these groups do. The best source to find such groups is the Internet.

Parents

Parents are usually told in a later stage as doubts give way to self-acceptance. The reason for this time lag is most often the question, "Will I still be loved by my parents?" and "How will they react and cope with me being gay?"

To openly talk to one's parents is a very important step in coming out. If this step is not performed, being gay remains a life-long game of hiding. It

is therefore critical for all confidants that this topic is treated with absolute confidence with respect to the parents. It is usually disastrous for the parent/child relationship if parents learn their child is gay from others.

God, Church, and Ministers

A crucially important question for New Apostolic gays is, "How shall I live my life, such that the Lord can bless me?" To pray for a partner is as important a matter for us as it is for heterosexual brothers and sisters. The church plays a significant role in this respect, too.

Sexuality is not the key aspect of being gay. The key aspect is love between two individual human adults (two men or two women), who want to live their lives together. We therefore long for a blessing of gay partnerships with an appropriate ceremony because the blessing of God is just as important for everything we do as it is for heterosexual brothers and sisters.

What can you do during this stage? The less prejudice you carry, the easier it is to help your brothers and sisters as a servant of God, and to counsel their souls as a minister.

For those of us who have confided in one of you, it was most important to encounter love and the desire to be understood. It would be a blessing if you could embrace us and comfort us without prejudice. One priest had said spontaneously, "Do you think that the Lord cares if a man is red-haired or left-handed? Do you think his love depends on being hetero or gay?" Affirm that they are loved, that they're alright, and their orientation doesn't matter.

Ask who else knows. If you're the first, please carefully determine who else could help. Ask them whom they could envision talking with besides yourself. Check to see if there are any coming out groups close by. Talking helps, otherwise thoughts go in circles and despair begins. Never push them to confide in someone if they aren't ready.

Carefully check which of the options above need further steps discussed and that all have been considered. Try to emphasize the respective end results. Please don't try to convert them into heterosexuals. Research has shown this is impossible.

Living Openly Gay

Living openly gay is the end of the coming out. Whoever does so and is still faithful to God has come a long way. It's disturbing how few brothers and sisters can be openly gay within the Church. If we accept the estimated conservative percentage of gays to be approximately 10% of the population, there should be many more among us. Where are they?

Have they given up their faith because the New Apostolic Church wouldn't offer a path on how to be gay and firmly believe in our Heavenly Father, or do they live secretly among us in marriages of convenience? Have they left the Church because they encountered judgment, ridicule, and rejection?

What can you do during this stage? With respect to coming out within a congregation, the current official position of our church is clearly defined: Gays should not to be set apart or condemned for who they are. It would be a blessing if this were a living example in every congregation,

as it already can be found in some. Try to be an example in this respect to your fellow ministers, brothers, and sisters.

Summary

Dear Ministers,

You have seen how urgently you are needed. Live in accordance with the commandment of Christ in John 13:34-35. "A new Commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another;" especially in respect to gay brothers and sisters. Don't be complacent. Be proactive! Please consider the following short summary of the topics discussed:

- listen to them with understanding and compassion
- pray with those whom ask your counsel
- learn more about alternate sexual orientations
- show paths and end results
- act bravely for those in need
- fight prejudice and assure them they're loved by God
- check options for further support (coming out groups)
- if needed, support the brothers and sisters in talks with their parents

Pray to our Heavenly Father for guidance that you have confidence in what you say when you are asked for help.

A heartfelt thank you to those of you who have practiced this as an example to others.

Your brothers and sisters of Rainbow-NAC

