

**“Courage” Ministry**  
**Article 78 December 2013**  
**Brendan Scarce**

**Courage and The New Evangelization: Part One**

**Introduction**

What a significant and marvellous year we have had in the universal church. A new pope is causing a revolution and winning the hearts and souls of the People of God and has recently proclaimed a stirring and challenging apostolic exhortation: *Evangelii Gaudium*.

**Making sense of the Pope's Call and the New Evangelization**

My responses are built on my experiences as a Courage Director, listening to same-sex attracted persons who declare they want to live the Gospel.

*Question One:* What **pastoral care** can Courage be for same-sex attracted persons to live the Gospel in the new evangelization era?

*Question Two:* How does Courage **guide** same-sex attracted people who want to live according to the Church's teaching?

*Question Three:* How does Courage **consolidate and affirm** a place for same-sex attracted people in the Church?

**Preliminary remarks before answering the questions in detail:**

The same-sex men and woman we see regularly in Courage do not want their same-sex attraction known to others outside the private group or social events that my wife hosts. For some the question of 'coming out' is raised. My response is: "Do others have the right to that knowledge about your private life or in fact have they deserved the honour of knowing what your interior life, or the issue of intimacies are?" In the "heart to heart" *deep calling upon deep Ps 42: 7* conversations, we need to be prudent, wise and simple. Matthew 10:16 is a constant mantra often used in counselling sessions - "Be as wise as a serpent and simple as a dove." I highlight this point to the listener, to the counsellee, to the phone or email enquirer. Because of possible misunderstanding and gossip the listener is exhorted and encouraged to remember this mantra if they feel the need to inform people of their sexual orientation.

## **The efficacy of the Word of God**

I have for years emphasized that we are persons made in God's image and likeness and when appropriate in the counselling room have asked the counsellee at times to read Psalm 139:14 and see the line: "Thank you Lord for the wonder of my being, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." This word surely must help our self esteem and image of self.

## **Personhood**

In my service to others personhood is a constant theme. Personhood must be emphasized and is a crucial factor for those who seek help. I have seen so many clients over the years – those on parole, those facing charges in court, those in jail, persons with a mental illness; and for all these they are not given a label. If a person has a psychiatric illness, like bipolar disorder, chronic depression or schizophrenia, that person is not known as a case but as a person. He or she is a person. If he is in jail I have not called him by his conviction: It is ...xxx who has been convicted of murder. In my eyes he is not known to me as a murderer, but a person who has been convicted of murder. This practice of mine carries over into my work in the spiritual and religious sphere when men and women consult me about themselves or another.

## **A radical view and observation**

I am not in support of creating a sub-class within the People of God. In our society we have made too much of a person's orientation – we ought to be satisfied with not being forced into meekly accepting the agenda of a forceful lobby group. I cannot recall anyone who has sought my help wanting to be known primarily as being same-sex attracted. Quite a few are anxious about people knowing about their struggles. Do we want to construct or institute a new permanent social class?

## **Now some answers:**

*Question One:* What pastoral care and support do we offer same sex attracted people to live the Gospel?

A fundamental quality is being a loving, welcoming person with the virtues and values of the Gospel. (Really, in being the person of Jesus). Pastoral care involves meeting the person where he or she is at, listening to his or her story, providing the sense for the same-sex attracted person that he or she has been heard and not judged. (I once had a client – a former prostitute, spontaneously tell me - "Oh you are not judging me!") That was one of the most memorable moments in my 25 years of secular counselling). This example reminds us of the attitude and disposition that is required in our pastoral care – an attitude that inspires trust.

**Some considerations that do assist the same-sex attracted in their quest for living the Gospel:-**

1. Being able to confide in some loving, caring, accepting person. (Maybe a priest, spiritual counsellor, older person, friend).
2. Having access to the sacrament of reconciliation and being assisted. (I have been informed by some men about their frustration within the confessional).
3. Meeting other men, (possibly in a group) who are striving to live a Gospel life. In the Courage ministry and group, dynamic intimacies are shared in a reverent, sacred space. Some things are told that have never been told to another and this becomes a freeing moment. (Gal. "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.") These are beautiful moments and evidence of the grace of the fellowship - koinonia.
4. Fellowship and social occasions

*Question Two:* How do we support (homosexual) same-sex attracted people who want to live according to the Church's teaching?

The support provided is one of easy access to a mentor, counsellor, priest, helper, like minded person of the same sex. (In the early days of Brisbane Courage we had an arrangement whenever one of the men was tempted to act out, he would ring one of the two men rostered and appointed to be available on the phone. The man was able at times to then go to the other member's place for support. This inevitably occurred late at night.

In the field of same-sex support we need tenacity, determination and commitment to be ready for helping. Over time deep friendships have developed and it is these men who provide Brisbane Courage with more contemporary wisdom and knowledge about their trials, expectations and hopes. For those who wish to live according to the Church's teachings, the following are suggested: Study of the CDF document, study of the Catholic Catechism, daily prayer time, frequent attendance at Mass – and extra times during the week if possible, regular confession, sharing the struggles with others, acknowledging the hard work involved in the process, socialization and the company of fellowship, the ability and chance to discuss and dialogue about same-sex attraction and other matters.

### **A possible role for Ecclesial Communities in the New Evangelization**

I have thought for a long time that the way some of the newer ecclesial communities are structured could be a place of accommodation, refuge and a stable place for such ministry. I am not suggesting a place where all the residents are same-sex attracted but a place or a family, housing one same-sex attracted person and incorporating the person as a family member. Perhaps the NeoCatechumenate, Focolare, Cursillo, Frassatti and Covenant communities could be encouraged to take a social justice communal step. Maybe some religious orders could implement pastoral strategies in line with the call of Pope Francis and the New Evangelization. The Capuchins in Melbourne were very strong supporters for ten years of *Courage* in the mid 80s to mid 90's, and while not providing accommodation I know of men who received considerable help from them.

## **MenAlive**

A very recent example for me, of the assistance a new apostolic group can provide for those who are same-sex attracted, is the MenAlive ministry. Two same-sex attracted men attended the March weekend, and unknown to one another beforehand, were assigned to be in the same group of seven men. This group has met a couple of times since March for a meal and fellowship. Both men have joined me in dinners and other meetings since and were most positive about the MenAlive experience. This sort of fellowship with a group of ordinary men is the ideal for those struggling with same-sex attraction. For the group does not concentrate on one's sexual orientation but does allow men to speak and share their human foibles and hopes in a very deep intimate way. This does become a natural healing process. (See my Courage Article 75 of June 2013 suggesting the possible sound benefits of MenAlive.)

## **Conclusion**

A crucial issue with a number of the same-sex attracted men that I have seen and still meet, is their isolation and profound loneliness. It is the extreme loneliness that is often a trigger for acting out. I believe that every person will thrive on fellowship (koinonia). If we are not being nurtured in a fellowship, or circle of koinonia, we stagnate, lose perspective and can be subjected to distorted ways of thinking and eventual dysfunctional behaviour. More about this in the next issue.

**Part two will be covered in the February issue.**

Courage is a ministry of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane.  
For further information contact: Telephone (07) 3865 2464 – Brendan Scarce,  
Michael Curtin 041 118 0264 Email: [Brisbanecourage@bigpond.com](mailto:Brisbanecourage@bigpond.com)