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Homosexuality

WELFARE SERVICES PACKET 1

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FIRST PRESIDENCY STATEMENT

Homosexuality

A homosexual relationship is viewed by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as sin in the same degree as adultery and fornication.

In summarizing the intended destiny of man, the Lord has declared: "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." (Moses 1:39.) Eternal life means returning to the Lord's exalted presence and enjoying the privilege of eternal increase. According to his revealed word, the only acceptable sexual relationship occurs within the family between a husband and a wife.

Homosexuality in men and women runs counter to these divine objectives and, therefore, is to be avoided and forsaken. Church members involved to any degree must repent. "By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them." (D&C 58:43.) Failure to work closely with one's bishop or stake president in cases involving homosexual behavior will require prompt Church court action. (*The Priesthood Bulletin*, February 1973, pp. 2, 3.)

INTRODUCTION

Different degrees of homosexuality range from childhood experimentation to adult obsession. Some include serious emotional disturbances of which sexual misbehavior is often a symptom. Some include a conscious choice of a homosexual life-style and a conscious rejection of the gospel. Other degrees include those who have been victims of sexual assault or incest in childhood with resulting emotional scars. These people can benefit from the help of an inspired priesthood leader.

These instructions concern the specific group of members who seek to continue in both homosexual and Church activities. Many seem sincere and seek the approval, or at least the sufferance, of the Church. This document, therefore, is for use by stake presidents, bishops, mission presidents, branch presidents, and others who are assigned to help these members.

This packet contains facts and ideas pertinent to the problem, suggestions for dealing with the rationalizations common among Latter-day Saint homosexuals, and guidelines for priesthood officers in their efforts to give the help needed to assist the person to return to a proper relationship with the Lord and with the Church.

The sin of homosexual behavior should be of grave concern to priesthood officers because—

1. It violates the Lord's eternal plan for man's progress.
2. It deprives God's children of true happiness and genuine fulfillment in family life.
3. It debases and demeans those involved.
4. It is as sinful as adultery and fornication.
5. It is carnal, sensual, and devilish.
6. It may involve violent, criminal behavior.

It is hoped that the following information will help stake presidents, bishops, and other designated leaders work with homosexual members in a spirit of love and compassion by exposing the lies and deceptions surrounding homosexual behavior. One of the characteristics of homosexuals is their skillful rationalization. Only when the erring person recognizes the total incompatibility of this degenerate practice with the will of the Lord can he or she begin to change and repent.

It is the purpose of the Lord's Church to apply all possible energy, love, and wisdom in helping wayward members change their behavior and earn joy in the Lord's kingdom whenever the sinner is willing to repent.

There is no easy or even commonly accepted "cure" for homosexuality. Professionally trained people differ in their opinions regarding both the cause and the cure, but the gospel makes the issue clear. Homosexuality is a sin, is learned behavior (not inborn), and can be stopped. Homosexuality, for whatever reasons, is very wrong; and until it stops, the persons involved are traveling the path to sorrow and possible loss of all privileges of membership in the Church. When the homosexual seeks help or can be awakened to his sins, help can be given through inspired, kindly priesthood leaders. Help should be given with mercy and justice. The most productive step is the erring member's confidential confession to a concerned bishop or stake president.

It is important to differentiate between sexual misconduct and emotional or social problems. A person can change immoral habits through self-control, aided by study of the gospel and the help of others. He may have emotional or social problems that result from or contribute to this immoral behavior, but sexual sin cannot be excused due to social or emotional troubles.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Definition: Homosexuality has many forms. It may be only a mental state without outward behavior, or it may include complete emotional and sexual genital involvement with a member of the same sex. Female homosexuals are called lesbians. Slang names include "gay," "queer," and other terms. There are two parts of homosexual behavior: the physical-sexual behavior and the emotional attachment.

Degrees: There are many degrees of homosexuality but homosexuals usually fit one of three categories: (1) Those who are fully involved and steeped in the transgression of homosexuality and engage in forms of sexual intercourse and genital activity. (2) Those who think about homosexuality without being sexually involved, and (3) Those in various stages between these extremes. In working with and disciplining these members, Church officers will want to consider the degree of homosexual involvement. (Some people are bi-sexual and may engage in sexual activity with members of both sexes.)

Origin: Homosexual behavior begins in various ways. Some young children are molested by strangers, acquaintances, or even relatives. This is usually deeply shocking and may cause feelings of unworth-

ness in the innocent victim. Believing himself to be unclean, he is easy prey in later experiences. However, not all who are molested become homosexual. Self-control, free agency, and help from others are very important factors in avoiding homosexuality. In some cases, homosexual behavior begins during childhood. Experimentation leads to habits that are at first physical, but later become deeply emotional and, therefore, much harder to change. A person may have homosexual inclinations but still participates in "normal" activities, marries, has children, and later yields to physical homosexuality. A traditional explanation of homosexuality is that the child has a domineering mother and a passive father. In all situations, it is important to determine when the habit began and how long it has been a problem to the person involved.

The priesthood leader will usually be able to help the homosexual with spiritual and physical behavior. No lasting change will occur in the homosexual without repentance and learning and living the gospel. No transformation will occur until the person abandons those things that lead to and include sexual sin. The first objective should be for the homosexual to change his behavior. His thinking can and must change. The statement, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he," applies directly to the homosexual.

Sin: Homosexuality, a sin in the same degree as adultery and fornication, deprives the sinner of the Lord's blessings. Homosexuality is scripturally labeled as an evil and major transgression. The scriptures and writings of the prophets are full of authoritative statements. Joseph Smith explained:

If you wish to go where God is, you must be like God, or possess the principles which God possesses, for if we are not drawing towards God in principle, we are going from Him and drawing towards the devil Search your hearts, and see if you are like God.... We have thieves among us, adulterers, liars, hypocrites. If God should speak from heaven, he would command you not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to covet, nor deceive, but be faithful over a few things. As far as we degenerate from God, we descend to the devil and lose knowledge, and without knowledge we cannot be saved, and while our hearts are filled with evil, and we are studying evil, there is no room in our hearts for good, or studying good. (Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1968], pp. 216-17.)

Paul also warned about sins that would be prevalent in our time that would be offensive to God:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be *lovers of their own selves*, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, *Without natural affection*, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, *lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God*; *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, *led away with divers lusts*. (2 Timothy 3:1-6.) (Italics added.)

Paul warned the Romans of similar sins:

...uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who...worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator,...*for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature*: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, *burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly*,...Back-biters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenant breakers, *without natural affection*, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. (Romans 1:24-27, 30-32.) (Italics added.)

Free Agency: Man is given total freedom to exercise choice and discretion. This free agency is the cornerstone of the Lord's plan for exaltation. The second Article of Faith states that men will be punished for their own sins. The Lord said:

That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment. (D&C 101:78.)

It is inconceivable that the Lord would indicate that the ultimate goal for man is eternal family life and then—as some involved in homosexuality claim—permit them to be born with desires and inclinations contrary to that eternal plan. This violates free agency and teaches the false doctrine of predestination. It creates disorder in God's house, which is a house of order.

Learned Behavior: To believe that immoral behavior is inborn or hereditary is to deny men have free agency to choose between sin and righteousness.

Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that

which is evil continually. But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God. Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil. (Moroni 7:12-14.)

For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit. (D&C 84:45, 46.)

Mercy and Justice: The Lord's word is clear concerning the unbreakable relationship between these two eternal laws:

For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved. What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay: not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God. (Alma 42:24, 25.)

Those who engage in homosexual behavior will have to submit to justice eventually so mercy can have effect. Although the Lord may have infinite mercy for them, yet the law requires that violators of the Lord's law be brought to justice. A full reading of Alma 42 will help one understand these important laws.

Exaltation: Man's proper course of behavior is gauged by God's highest wishes concerning him. Exaltation or enthronement and patriarchal leadership for eternity is a father's greatest reward. It is only possible when one is married. A woman is both wife and mother. A man is both husband and father. None of these roles can be performed through homosexual relationships. Any behavior that prevents one from receiving these eternal blessings is evil.

Eternal Increase: Eternal increase is the greatest blessing in the celestial kingdom. In mortality, Adam and Eve were commanded to "multiply and replenish the earth." To intentionally disobey this command, when one has a choice, is disobedience of the Lord's highest calling.

Rationalization: The homosexual is often skillful at rationalizing, as are many who wish to maintain improper behavior. Until the homosexual accepts the eternal, unchanging truths about sexual conduct,

he is in error and sin. There is no way around this fact. Isaiah warned about rationalization:

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20.)

Nephi gave this warning:

Woe unto the wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight! (2 Nephi 15:21.)

Rationalization is a sign of the latter days to the extent that even the very elect shall be deceived by cunning men:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily *shall bring in damnable heresies*, even denying the Lord that brought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow *their pernicious ways*; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; *beguiling unstable souls*; an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children:

These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they *allure through the lusts of the flesh*, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the *servants of corruption*; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, *they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning*. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. (2 Peter 2:1, 2, 14, 17-22.) (Italics added.)

Some homosexuals attempt to rationalize by classifying the love between David and Jonathan as homosexual. In 2 Samuel 1:26, David says their love surpassed "the love of women." The type of love he meant is clearly stated and reiterated in other places as the love of the soul or spiritual love: "and Jonathan loved him [David] as his own soul." (1 Samuel 18:1.) There is no truth in the claim of homosexuality between David and Jonathan. Such a relationship would have violated the Mosaic law so severely that the two young men would probably have been put to death for such behavior.

Attitudes: Probably the most crucial single factor in the rehabilitation of the homosexual is his or her attitude. *An attitude of stiffneckedness and rebellion is almost always a clear indication of the need to be sternly disciplined, even to excommunication so that others are not contaminated by unclean habits.* One of the indications of a poor attitude is seen when the person is angry with the words of the Lord or his spokesmen:

And it speaketh harshly against sin, according to the plainness of the truth; wherefore, no man will be angry at the words which I have written save he shall be of the spirit of the devil. (2 Nephi 33:5.)

Repentance: Repentance involves changed or changing behavior. No amount of regret, sorrow, or emotion compensates for continuation of sin. Repentance must result in forsaking evil behavior. Even when repentance takes diligent effort and continual stumbling, the eventual goal must be complete change. Then the Lord's mercy can be realized in the way that President Spencer W. Kimball describes:

Repentance is the key to forgiveness. It opens the door to happiness and peace and points the way to salvation in the Kingdom of God. It unlocks the spirit of humility in the soul of man and makes him contrite of heart and submissive to the will of God. (Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1969], p. 133.)

Kindness: Treating homosexuals with courtesy and kindness is essential. Being rude or contemptuous only builds barriers that prevent healthy understanding and change. Those who work with sinners of any type would do well to emulate the Savior's courteous and considerate treatment of wayward people.

Forgiveness: The truly penitent sinner who forsakes his sins needs hope and encouragement. When true repentance and change has occurred, he needs to know of the Lord's complete and total mercy:

Wherefore I say unto you, *All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.* (Matthew 12:31,32.) (Italics added.)

Patience: The Lord's love is infinite. Those working with the lost sheep must also exercise godly love and patience. It is the work and glory of Heavenly Father to see his children earn eternal happiness. Unceasing effort is required of his servants. As long as the sinner is trying to repent, he merits the attention of the Church.

Love: Love is the greatest commandment. All others are based on it. One with godlike love welcomes a repentant sinner. Officers of the Church should demonstrate godlike love. The Lord said:

Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you whom I love, and whom I love I also chasten that their sins may be forgiven, for with the chastisement I prepare a way for their deliverance in all things out of temptation, and I have loved you— (D& C 95:1.)

Gospel Education: Homosexuals, especially those deeply involved, have learned unclean and unhealthy ways of life, both sexually and spiritually. A thorough reeducation in the gospel is essential. It may also be necessary to teach the proper and desirable ways of developing relationships with members of the opposite sex. The proper male role needs to be learned and practiced. This is an appropriate role for a wise home teacher or someone else selected by proper priesthood inspiration.

Sexual Attitudes: Misunderstanding of sexuality among Latter-day Saint people can contribute to homosexuality. Too often, parents who desire to teach chastity to their children teach that sex is unclean or distasteful. Thus a child develops conflicts that may later cause serious difficulty in his associations with members of the opposite sex.

Chastity is a positive process of self-control in anticipation of the happiness and joy of procreation and parenthood within the bounds of legal, and, ideally, temple marriage. As President Harold B. Lee said to married couples:

Both of you must remember that the prime purpose of your marriage under God's command is to build the bridge from the eternity of spirits to mortality, over which God's spirit children might come into mortal

bodies. Your failure to remember that revealed truth will be your failure to attain the highest bliss in married life. (Harold B. Lee, *Youth and the Church* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1970], p. 174.)

The Savior himself was conceived as a result of the lawful and sacred relationship between the Father and Mary. Sexual intercourse within the bounds set by God is a proper, healthy blessing to both man and wife. This attitude must be conveyed to young people whether or not they are involved homosexually.

Dating: Ironically, those with homosexual tendencies find the Church's attitudes about dating and avoiding premarital intimacy most agreeable. They often rationalize by saying that Church restrictions about dating before sixteen years of age, delaying marriage until after a mission, and avoiding intimacy until marriage is ideal for their style of life. Some latent homosexuals thus allow themselves to be pushed toward active homosexual involvement. It is necessary to instruct and help these few young people in their responsibilities to prepare for marriage. Healthy group associations with members of the opposite sex that provide the necessary maturing experiences should be encouraged. Resistance may be a sign of the need for help. Priesthood leaders can counsel young people, through their parents, to lead an active, healthy social life.

Self-Control: Even though a lonely person may be seeking companionship, finding it through homosexual contacts violates the Lord's laws. The homosexual gives up his self-control and free agency just as an adulterer or alcoholic does. The concern, then, is not his loneliness, but whether or not he attempts to master his passions.

Prayer: A fervent prayer of the heart and soul is the most effective way for the homosexual to reestablish contact with his Heavenly Father.

Your therapy should include encouragement to return to prayer, not wordy repetition of wornout phrases, but a communication prayer wherein the individual seeks help from the Lord and then listens with understanding and determination. (*Hope for Transgressors* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1970], p. 5.)

Confidentiality: For a person to repent, especially of this sin, his dignity and self-respect must be kept intact as much as possible. Public scorn and humiliation serve Satan's needs and stand in the way of new and better behavior. Sinners must have complete confidence that they may lay their lives bare before their bishop and never fear violation of his sacred trust.

Extent: Statistics concerning the extent of homosexuality in the Church are not available. There is no reason to suppose it is more widespread than other sins; however, the scriptures clearly say that it is to be one of the most prevalent evils of the last days. Its presence is cause for great concern, but not panic. Homosexuality should not be tolerated, as any sin should not be tolerated, but one should strive diligently to help the sinner.

POLICIES

Activity in the Church: Service in the Church is both a responsibility and a privilege. The repentant homosexual can be strengthened by serving in "safe" callings. Assignments should never place the person in a position of temptation. If he was involved with young boys, he *must not* be used in the Aaronic Priesthood MIA. If a woman was involved with other women, she *must not* serve in Relief Society callings or work with women or girls in the Aaronic Priesthood MIA. Common sense and wisdom will help priesthood leaders make assignments. The length of time from the last instance of misbehavior is an important factor. A return too soon to full activity in the Church mocks the process of repentance. Too long a delay can deprive a person of healing blessings. This is a matter for inspired judgment. Callings should relate to a man's worthiness to exercise the priesthood, but he can also serve without exercising the priesthood. He should not be permitted to exercise it too soon. President Spencer W. Kimball explains this further:

Church penalties for sin involve deprivations—the withholding of temple privileges, priesthood advancements, Church positions and other opportunities for service and growth. Such deprivations result from errors which are not always punishable by serious measures but which render the perpetrator unworthy to give leadership and receive high honors and blessings in God's Kingdom.

These are all retardations in our eternal progress which a person brings on himself. Even without any official Church actions, for example, a person breaking the Word of Wisdom excludes himself from Church office and often—by staying away from Church—from Church fellowship. (Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, p. 326.)

Temple Recommends: Bishops and stake presidents should include specific questions concerning homosexuality in interviews for temple recommends. One possible wording of these questions is, "Have you had any sexual involvement with anyone other than your spouse,

male or female?" And, for the unmarried member, "Have you had any sexual contact with another person, male or female?"

Parents' Interviews: Throughout life, parents should instruct and counsel with their children in the area of morality and sexual behavior. Private and personal interviews between parent and youth should, ideally, precede interviews with the bishop or stake president.

Priesthood Leaders' Interviews: Bishops and stake presidents are expected to clearly inquire into sexual behavior when considering youth for missions. Rather than just using the term *homosexuality*, they might refer to "sexual contact with women or men." The stake president's final interview should be conducted as close to the youth's departure for the mission home as possible. His initial interview, before submitting the person's name to the Missionary Committee, needs to be as thorough and searching as the final one. Interviews throughout the member's life will give him or her the opportunity to confess to homosexual behavior, beginning with the deacon's call (or girl's youth interview) and continuing through maturity and temple recommend interviews. Care should be taken not to arouse undue curiosity in the young, but many tragedies will be averted if this behavior is dealt with sooner rather than later.

Interviews for attendance at Church schools also include this question. Applicants are not to be approved if they are engaged in homosexual practices. Homosexuals should be dealt with as would fornicators and adulterers who apply to Church schools.

Church Educational System: Persons who have engaged in homosexual relations and who have not totally repented and forsaken these evil practices will not be admitted to study at or be employed by any Church university, college, school, or program. Students or staff who engage in such behavior while involved with the Church Educational System will be dismissed. When such an expulsion occurs, the Church school concerned should contact the young person's bishop or branch president.

Missionaries: Practices which cause physical intimacy should be strictly avoided. Missionaries should always find housing accommodations that provide separate beds. All bathing and dressing should be done with propriety and privacy. Brotherhood and sisterhood in the mission field need not extend beyond the respect and affection that is conveyed with the true Spirit of the Lord.

Procedures for dealing with missionaries who are found to be actively homosexual in the mission field are the same as for those who commit adultery or fornication.

Church Officers and Employees: Those men or women who hold positions of trust, responsibility, and influence as officers or employees of the Church are subject to higher laws. Whenever their conduct has proven to be immoral, they are to be released immediately. Those whose thoughts are unhealthy but have not as yet given in to the temptation should be worked with closely as they repent but may, if wisdom and the Spirit dictate, be kept in their position so long as it does not intensify their temptation.

Courts (Church): In the early days of the restored Church, bishops courts and high council courts were a means of examining important matters as well as disciplining members. When it is necessary to go beyond the confidential interview to examine the status of a homosexual member, the procedures outlined in the *General Handbook of Instructions* should be followed.

Excommunication and Disfellowshipping: These actions are for two purposes, not necessarily different. Disfellowshipping denies temporarily an unworthy person the privileges of the Lord's kingdom. Excommunication cleanses the Church and releases the person from the blessings of baptism and, when applicable, the endowment. Policy and procedure for church courts are found in the *General Handbook of Instructions*.

Investigation of Suspected Behavior: The bishop or branch president may need to make special confidential inquiries into suspected behavior. At the same time, the method of the Church is to confront the accused candidly, to invite him to confess, and to offer evidence concerning the accusation in strict accordance with church court procedures.

Involvement of Others: Since homosexuality is possible only with others, disclosure of sexual partners is considered an essential part of repentance. The purpose is to help save others. Priesthood leaders must be careful not to reveal their sources as they make contact with those whose names they are given.

Needs: Many active Latter-day Saints involved in homosexuality are seeking the same companionship and emotional intimacy that others seek. They are usually unable to find it and are thus lonely and insecure. This leads them toward homosexuality and makes it harder

to stop their illicit behavior. It also prevents their loneliness from being counteracted by healthy Church activity and friendship.

Identification of Homosexuals: There are many ideas about the outward appearance and behavior of homosexuals. Some of these ideas are misleading, and could cause great damage, especially when innocent people are falsely accused. Among the more reliable signs are excessive involvement with members of the same sex by those who are physically mature, who do not date, and who lack interest in marriage.

Group Treatment: Because there is such a strong emotional attraction among homosexuals, group meetings or group therapy are potentially dangerous, especially in the stages before true rejection of illicit behavior. Therefore, group treatment should not be used.

Professionals: A professionally trained person (social worker, counselor, or psychiatrist) can assist the bishop or branch president in determining the presence of mental or emotional disturbance, especially an illness that is dangerous to the person or to others. An active professional Latter-day Saint counselor with the necessary blend of gospel background and professional skills can help. Without the gospel background, the professional might not deal with homosexuality in a manner pleasing to the Lord. Church Social Service agencies can be helpful here.

Temptation: Homosexuality is a powerful habit. Successful change will result only when the person removes himself as far from temptation as possible. The homosexual must flee from companions, bars, discussions, and any other unworthy influence that would drag him down, just as Joseph literally ran away from Potiphar's wife. There is no gradual or subtle way. A sympathetic effort to work with other homosexuals to "help" them is especially dangerous. Nothing is gained and much can be lost by continued association.

Molestation: When a member of the Church molests a child, attacks someone, or commits incest, he may become subject to the police and the courts. He needs treatment and help in a manner that protects others from becoming his victims.

Perversion: This term, while technically correct, is not the type of label that is likely to open communication between a stake president or bishop and a homosexual. It is true that homosexual behavior is a perversion or deviation from the Lord's ways, but homosexuals are

children of God, although they are fallen and wayward. One can avoid raising barriers to communication without in any way condoning evil practices.

Emotional and Physical Problems: If emotional or physical problems exist along with immoral behavior, the bishop or stake president may arrange counseling or seek information through the welfare services committee, the Church Social Services agencies or a trustworthy, professionally qualified person. At the same time, the discouragement and confusion of emotional stress often make a person vulnerable to sexual immorality. The object is to learn a new way of life.

Masturbation: Masturbation is a sin because it is basically an act of self-debasement and abuse, but it is not homosexuality when practiced alone. When one person masturbates another, it is a homosexual act. While self-masturbation is not in the category of homosexuality, it should be dealt with kindly but firmly so the person can put it behind him or her and build a clean, self-controlled life. There are specific steps that the person himself can take. The first, of course, is fasting and prayer to enlist the support of the Lord to put oneself in a teachable position. Elder Mark E. Petersen has listed some steps in private correspondence after many years of experience in helping *those with this problem*. While these are focused on the adolescent, they can also apply to adults.

1. Never touch the intimate parts of your body except during normal toilet processes.
2. Avoid being alone as much as possible. Find good company and stay in this good company.
3. If you are associated with other boys (or girls) having this same problem, *you must break off their friendship*. Never associate with other persons having the same weakness. Don't suppose that two of you will quit together. You never will. You must get away from people of that kind. Just to be in their presence will keep your problem foremost in your mind. The problem must be taken *out of your mind*, for that is where it really exists. Your mind must be on other more wholesome things.
4. When you bathe, do not admire yourself in a mirror. Never stay in the bath more than five or six minutes—just long enough to bathe and dry and dress *and then get out of the bath room* into a room where you will have some member of your family present.
5. When in bed, if that is where you have your problem for the most part, dress yourself for the night so securely that you can-

not easily touch your vital parts, and so that it would be difficult and time consuming for you to remove those clothes. By the time you start to remove the protective clothing, you would have sufficiently controlled your thinking that the temptation would leave you.

6. If the temptation seems overpowering while you are in bed, *get out of bed and go into the kitchen and fix yourself a snack*, even if it is in the middle of the night, even if you are not hungry, and despite your fears of gaining weight. The purpose behind this suggestion is that you *get your mind on something else*. You must change the subject of your thoughts so to speak.
7. Never read pornographic material. Never read about your problem. Keep it out of your mind. Remember—"first a thought, then an act."

Females/Lesbians: While most homosexual activity may be regarded as being among men, women are also involved in homosexuality and are subject to the same principles and policies to which men are subject.

Fetishes: One extreme form of emotionally disturbed behavior that usually requires professional attention is called a fetish. A person with a fetish receives sexual stimulation from objects such as underclothes, shoes, and other items. This and other extreme forms of behavior are mental disturbances, and any homosexual behavior is a symptom rather than the central problem.

Roommates: The practice among unmarried adults of having roommates, while almost always proper and even desirable, sometimes contains the potential for sin. Thorough, regular interviews with the bishop are very important. Activity in Church programs builds spirituality and friendship that compensate to some degree for the loneliness of being unmarried. An active social life carried on in wholesome circumstances can often lead to marriage, although later than usual.

Pornography: Use of pornography in any form only adds to lustful, sick, and sinful desires. It can also be an indication of homosexual involvement. Whether or not it causes homosexuality is not the point. It is, of itself, evil.

Hormone Imbalance: In some cases a predominance of hormones may result in one having slight physical characteristics of the opposite sex. Boys may have rounded hips, slightly enlarged breasts, or feminine voices; girls may have narrow hips, etc. There is no conclusive evidence that links endocrine or hormonal imbalance to homosexuality.

In some cases, the situation may promote reactions by peers, parents, and teachers that create emotional problems that can lead to homosexuality, but the chemical balance itself is not proven to be a cause.

HELPING STEPS

Helping the Homosexual: The amount of help that can be given depends upon the person's willingness and desire to change. Homosexuality is not a sickness that can be easily cured by medicine or a vaccination. It is a learned habit that can be repented of and controlled by learning other ways of life that are healthier and righteous. Change is seldom easy or rapid and requires support from others and mature self-control from within.

While it is an extremely difficult habit to change, homosexuality can be repented of as can any other deeply entrenched habit. The alcoholic or the adulterer has as much to overcome, and many have done so with complete success. As with the alcoholic or adulterer (or one participating in any other wrong behavior), the homosexual will have to avoid for the rest of his or her life the thoughts, circumstances, and temptations which lead to immoral behavior. Forgiveness is complete when repentance is total, but that does not make a person impervious to sin.

The greatest strength of the priesthood leader who is engaged in working with a homosexual member is the inspiration of the Spirit. It is not intended that a bishop, for example, attempt to "cure" the mental problems of these people. If mental illness or disturbance is present, qualified professional people may be utilized *if they understand and support gospel truth concerning proper behavior*. Because the world does not view homosexuality as the Church does, i.e., as a sin, counsel received from "worldly" counselors could be very confusing to a Latter-day Saint.

Four specific areas seem to promote change and personal growth in the homosexual: sincere confession, gospel education, social support, and personal refinement.

1. Sincere Confession: One absolute necessity for ultimate forgiveness is sincere confession to a bishop or stake president. Regular contacts with the bishop are needed to thoroughly assess the situation.

2. **Gospel Education:** Experience has shown that even when the homosexual is a returned missionary, he is often illiterate in gospel terms. He needs to develop a thorough, spiritual testimony as well as a complete acquaintance with basic doctrines, especially those pertaining to personal development, family life, and exaltation. Private tutoring from a reliable, mature priesthood member is helpful. The goal is not technical theological competence, but a humble desire to seek the Lord's truth.
3. **Social Support:** Guilt, shame, sorrow, and severe loneliness may be among the emotions of the homosexual. Long-term sincere support from others can be invaluable as the person struggles with change and repentance. He needs to have at least one upon whom he may lean in his weakness and from whom he can learn a new way of life. Through discussions, activities, and imitation, he needs to learn what a heterosexual life is and what a manly priesthood leader and father does. He needs to learn that sex, while important between husband and wife, is not the consuming issue it often is between homosexual partners. He needs to learn of the fulfillment men feel through fatherhood, vocation, and avocation. In essence, he must be introduced to and learn the heterosexual or "straight" way of life from reliable, warm, honest, and firm friends; he may need to completely forsake old friends. These same factors are crucial for the female or lesbian, as she needs to learn feminine behavior.
4. **Personal Refinement:** Whether downcast by their sins or just discouraged by personal inadequacies, most homosexuals need to build up their self-esteem. This is impossible, of course, while they are engaged in wrong behavior. To completely repent they need to correct personal deficiencies which contribute to low self-respect. Some may need tutoring for reading deficiencies, while others may be overweight or might have a skin problem. Many are undereducated in relation to their potential or are employed in an undesirable situation. Whatever is lacking, concrete steps can be taken to fill the gap and thereby help the person earn self-respect so he no longer will want to demean himself.

These four avenues for helping the homosexual naturally fit into the home teaching area. If a bishop can assign home teachers who can help in all four areas on a warm, firm, confidential basis, much good can result.

Conclusion: The longer homosexuality continues, the more powerful its tentacles become and the more strongly it imprisons the homosexual. Priesthood officers who have the responsibility to deal with these matters need to be wise, firm, merciful, and just. Their aim should be to help the Lord's children repent and forsake evil. By severely condemning the sin but striving as a loving brother with the wayward child of God, they can achieve much good. This work of redemption and forgiveness is done strictly and unequivocally on the Lord's terms, and on none other. President Kimball has said:

To every forgiveness there is a condition. The plaster must be as wide as the sore. The fasting, the prayers, the humility must be equal to or greater than the sin. There must be a broken heart and a contrite spirit. There must be "sackcloth and ashes." There must be tears and genuine change of heart. There must be conviction of the sin, abandonment of the evil, confession of the error to properly constituted authorities of the Lord. There must be restitution and a confirmed, determined change of pace, direction and destination. Conditions must be controlled and companionship corrected and changed. (Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, p. 353.)

There is no place in God's Church for those who persist in vile behavior. There is a place for those who present themselves humbly and contritely before the Lord and his common judges for the purpose of penitent change.

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