

## REGARDING OUR MINISTRY TO THE GAY AND LESBIAN COMMUNITY

As a teacher in the public school system for a number of years I noticed, in particular, the ways in which young gay and lesbian students were treated by other students or how they believed they would be treated as if they were to come out to the student body.

While times have changed to a great degree over the last 10 years with regard to gay and lesbian students, and many of them find acceptance, or at least toleration, from their fellow students and teachers, there are still a great number who have a difficult time coping with their realization that they are gay and do not quite fit into what is expected of them by their parents, teachers, friends, and possibly society in general. Because of these feelings these students may find themselves alone and very much separated from the rest of their friends or, in some cases, live a life of lies which prevent them from fully enjoying their high school experience. For many of them going away to college is the best possible relief from this life of secrecy; to be in a place where no one knows them and they can find acceptance and be able to live their lives as they choose.

What most of these young people fail to appreciate is that, for many of their family and friends, there truly is no secret here. Someone knows the truth and is being kind enough not to tell. It may be their mother, a sibling, their best friend; but whoever it is and however they know the young person themselves may still be trying to deny who they are or possibly hope that it is just a phase and they will grow out of it. For this individual, life may be difficult but it is not impossible.

There is however that individual who comes from a family background that is so strict or so much in denial, or so much in refusal to accept the possibility that one of their children is gay that the young person concerned feels hopeless and may even feel an urge toward committing suicide or harming themselves in some drastic way. The truth is, if you are this person or you know someone who is this person, they are not alone and you have somewhere to turn where you will find someone who cares.

Many of us have been told that God hates the homosexual and that being homosexual is living a life of sin which will lead only to hell. The truth is, whether one is homosexual or heterosexual they are living a life of sin for: "There is no one who exists who does not sin." (*Byzantine funeral liturgy*) It is the hope of our ministry to the gay and lesbian bisexual transgender community that we will be able to help the individual seeking our assistance in coming to a better understanding of who they are and how this aspect of their lives can be understood within the context of a loving relationship with God. We will not "cure" something that is not an illness. We will not "change" something that is an integral part of the human person. What this ministry is designed to do is allow the person to accept who they are as a gift of God, and a child of God, and how their sexuality can be expressed within the boundaries of a holistic Christian environment. This program is not designed to be an explanation of the, "Love the sinner, hate the sin," mentality but rather be a place for the individual to seek out and understand how who they are as a gay man or woman can utilize these gifts for the service of

God with the their own personal environment and community.

It is our hope that the young man or woman who participates in this ministry will come to an understanding of their relationship with God knowing that they are loved for who they are and as they are and that there is no need to be ashamed and escape into dark quiet corners or, on the other hand, go to the other extreme and be flamboyant and “in your face” about their sexuality. Rather, that this young man or woman may learn to understand their sexuality as a facet of their overall personality that can be respected, appreciated, and celebrated.

If you are drawn to be part of this type of the ministry please feel free to contact Archbishop George Michael and let him know of your interest. No one will be turned away from this ministry for any reason. As long as you want to come and speak with a member of our monastery, you will be welcome to do so. Know that God loves you as you are and he created you out of that same love.