

QLGF

Part of the Rainbow

A plain Quaker look at Lesbian
Gay and Bisexual lives

© 1993 and 2004 Quaker Lesbian and Gay Fellowship (QLGF)

*For more information about QLGF visit www.qlgf.org.uk
or contact:*

*Ruth, 46 The Avenue, Starbeck,
Harrogate, Yorks, HG1 4QD.
qlgfcontact@btclick.com*

Our thanks to all those who commented on the text or who provided personal experiences for it.

We reproduce on pages 28 and 29 a letter from Quaker Life. Of course this in no way implies that Quaker Life necessarily endorses any specific comments we make

Part of the Rainbow

A plain Quaker look at Lesbian Gay and Bisexual lives

In 1993, the Quaker Lesbian and Gay Fellowship published *Speaking our Truth*. It sought to explain the reality of lesbian, gay and bisexual lives to those in the Society of Friends who wanted, or needed, to be better informed.

Much has happened since 1993 in society at large, within the Society of Friends, and in other religious groups. So in the spirit of *Advices and Queries 22* we have expanded, revised and renamed that booklet, to

celebrate progress, to expose prejudice and to spread understanding.

For most of us, being lesbian or gay is a matter of fact and genuine pride. While as Quakers we can be all too conscious of our failings in everyday life, being lesbian or gay is not a failing. Few of us, we believe, would change if we had the option. On the contrary, there is much in our lives and in our community we can celebrate - including our strength in overcoming ignorance and adversity.

Respect the wide diversity among us in our lives and relationships. Refrain from making prejudiced judgements about the life journeys of others. Do you foster the spirit of mutual understanding and forgiveness which our discipleship asks of us? Remember that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.

Advices and Queries 22 [from the 1994 edition of Quaker Faith and Practice]

By its very nature a book of this type has to address a variety of criticisms and misunderstandings. It should not be assumed that we are obsessed with our critics, and most of us spend our Quaker lives with the same concerns as anyone else.

We will begin with two contrasting testimonies.

* * *

Jane and Susie come from a Northern meeting:

We called our day "A celebration of our relationship". It was a Meeting for Commitment, but we wanted to remember the last seventeen years of our life together as well as thinking about the future. We both had the most wonderful day; a hundred and thirty of our friends and family came to celebrate with us, and we were overwhelmed by the love and support from Friends at both our Meetings. It was a day of true reconciliation and joy; members of Jane's family who hadn't met since a quarrel thirty-five years ago had to be reintroduced to each other.

We began the process by approaching Elders, and then had two Meetings for Clearness with four friends. This was a very valuable part of the process, and enabled us to consider carefully why we wanted to do this after so long, and what difference we expected it to make in our lives. A minute of record was also made at Monthly Meeting.

"We wanted to remember the last seventeen years of our life together as well as thinking about the future."

Members of our clearness committee then turned into our support group, and helped us run the day. After a very moving Meeting for Worship we had tea and cakes together, and then danced to music from Susie's circle dance band.

We had literally hundreds of cards - thanks to all our Friends and friends who remembered us. [2003]

The speaker and her partner are both women

“My partner and I had lived together for over twenty years. I was close to my partner’s mother, Elisabeth, who lived near us and supported us, particularly when I was raising our small children.

When Elisabeth had a heart attack, we accompanied her to hospital. My partner left her bedside in order to phone her brothers. When we were alone, Elisabeth turned to me and asked “Am I dying?” I told her I didn’t know but could go and find out: I believe everyone has the right to know the answer. I found out that indeed she was dying, but when I tried to return to her room, I was told I could not go in. When asked my relationship I had stupidly said “friend” - it was because I was not a relative that I was denied entrance. By the time my partner had returned, Elisabeth had died - alone.

In the years that have passed since, I have regretted so much that I hadn’t described myself as her daughter-in-law, as indeed I was and had been for twenty years.”

"In the years that have passed since, I have regretted so much that I hadn't described myself as her daughter-in-law, as indeed I was and had been for twenty years"

Where are we now?

A decade of progress

We still live in a society where irrational prejudice against lesbians and gay men [Note 1] is widespread. Many lesbians and gay men have been repudiated by their families, their erstwhile friends and often their worshipping communities. Prejudice may be seen in a wide variety of discriminatory laws, in violent attacks on lesbians and gay men, and in the extraordinary bile still poured out against us by many in the churches and the media. There is also a widespread view that we are somehow second best, and our lives and relationships are not to be taken seriously.

Yet in only a decade there has been significant progress for lesbians and gay men. There are substantially more openly lesbian and gay figures in politics, the media and popular culture. Opinion polls suggest a substantial decline in hostility towards same gender relationships. The age of consent for gay men has finally been equalised with that for heterosexual men. Most recently the right to adopt children was extended to same gender couples. Paradoxically, individual gay and lesbian people could already adopt.

In little more than a decade, support for lesbian and gay issues has gone from being, allegedly, a terrible political liability, to being a matter creating tension and crisis among conservative forces. The Government has recently legislated to allow legal recognition of same gender relationships, reform of the law so transsexuals can legally become their 'acquired gender', and the blatantly discriminatory Section 28 has finally been repealed. [Note 2] Discrimination in employment and the criminal law is also being tackled. If this programme is carried through, the legal position of lesbians and gay men will have dramatically improved. Indeed, the consultation paper on a relationship law stated that reducing prejudice in society is one intention behind the proposal.

Nevertheless, better laws do not bring full equality, as we have seen with both race and gender. Most of these changes have been strongly resisted. The heterosexual majority may not realise that lesbian and gay people still face harassment and violence. Outside a few cosmopolitan areas in large cities, even the slightest display of affection may mean that they are attacked. For the time being, same gender couples still face discrimination in matters like consent to medical treatment, being accepted as next of kin, housing, inheritance, and taxation. Many pension schemes, including flagship public schemes such as that of the NHS, do not currently provide for same gender couples. Lesbians and gay men face discrimination at work. Bullying is a problem faced by many children but it can be particularly acute for those who feel they might be different in this way. Finally, our country remains divided by race, by gender, and by class. Many of

these developing freedoms have gone to the articulate middle class gay man - it is often more difficult to be open about your orientation if you are female, poor, or from an ethnic minority. No-one in the lesbian and gay community should be indifferent to other forms of prejudice and discrimination and indeed from their own experience lesbians and gay men should oppose oppression in all fields.

Quakers continue to move forward

It has been an important decade also for the Religious Society of Friends. In 1994 British Quakers adopted a new book of discipline. The new Advices and Queries specifically address prejudice against different 'life journeys', drafted expressly with same gender relationships in mind. Chapter 22 of Quaker Faith and Practice on relationships was adopted only with some dissent and pain. However, the range of views expressed there include no condemnation and no prejudice, and much celebration and understanding of lesbians and gay men, as well as some sensitive comment about HIV-AIDS. Britain Yearly Meeting endorsed the possibility of recognising same gender relationships through a Meeting for Commitment - and now at least three male couples, and three female couples, have chosen to mark their relationships in this way (as well as an opposite gender couple who had an objection to marriage).

More recently in 2001, a booklet on pastoral care "Committed Relationships" was produced by the national committee on Eldership and Oversight. This more or less assumes that local meetings should celebrate same gender commitments if asked, on as equal a basis as possible with marriage. However, many Monthly Meetings have yet to address the issue and it is far from clear whether a couple wishing to celebrate their relationship would actually be able to do so, in much of the country.

Whatever flaws the Society still has, it remains more welcoming to lesbians and gay men than almost any other religious denomination. Every time a meeting has cake to celebrate a lesbian couple's anniversary or puts a gay man in charge of a children's meeting or

demurs from some sweeping statement by ‘the Church’, it is manifesting our highest principles - following the promptings of love and truth, rather than dogma. Lesbian and gay Friends are part of the Quaker rainbow, and many British Meetings cheerfully acknowledge, welcome and celebrate that fact.

The unholy opposition

This booklet was redrafted over a turbulent few months of 2003. In that time, the secular State brought forward several significant proposals to better the lot of lesbians and gay men, and transgender people. At the same time, the shocking depths of ignorance and prejudice by some claiming religious motivation became clear to all.

Over the last decade, the opposition to lesbian and gay people has increasingly come from those claiming to be motivated by religion. Lesbians and gays in many other religious organisations still face vilification and attack. Attempts to liberalise in the other churches have led to witch-hunts and persecutions. Many evangelical or conservative groups now proclaim hostility to gay and lesbian people to be ‘the touchstone’ of religious orthodoxy. Such groups seek to remove those who disagree with them, including the current Archbishop of Canterbury, unless they endorse and defend the most simplistic analysis of the Biblical attitude to sexuality and relationships. This is not only a Christian problem, for example, the most extreme Muslim groups equate homosexuality with incest and bestiality and advocate the murder of all lesbian and gay Muslims as apostates.

In the summer of 2003, the mainstream churches demanded and won the right to sack lesbian and gay employees purely because of the prejudice of their employers. This power will probably be used to try to get rid of teachers in church schools. Canon Jeffrey John, a celibate gay man willing to uphold his church’s discipline, was driven from his intended post as Bishop of Reading by a well orchestrated international campaign. Church leaders across the world threatened

to ostracise a diocese in Canada because it proposed to celebrate faithful same gender relationships, and to split from the American Episcopal Church because it elected a gay bishop. The Catholic Church claimed in an official statement that any lesbian or gay couple rearing a child were guilty of 'violence' against that child and that any legal recognition of same sex relationships was 'immoral'. Yet, all of these religious organisations are full of faithful lesbian and gay people, committed to their churches, part of one body.

Liberal Friends may not realise just how vehement many of these views are. The accusations made, often under the cloak of religion, are that lesbians and gay people are incapable of loving, long-lasting, adult relationships; that we are physically mentally and morally sick; that we spread disease, in particular HIV and AIDS; and that we are a danger to children. Using these arguments, religious organisations have campaigned politically against equality in areas as diverse as the age of consent, attempts to stop bullying, partnership law and adoption. Remember that these are churches with whom we seek fellowship within local ecumenical groups and nationally - not tiny fundamentalist sects.

Lesbians and gay men are human beings with all the strengths, weaknesses and diversities that this involves. However, the Quaker Lesbian and Gay Fellowship believes that our lives and relationships show the rich fruits of the spirit - that both our own lives and those of our friends in other churches and in none, expose hostile views as both hate-filled and untruthful. We see lesbians and gays in loving and faithful relationships; living lives of great service to others; as devoted parents rearing happy and sane children - or offering desperately needed support to those who do have children; in short bringing the same mixture of gifts to life as any other group of people. Being gay is neither good nor bad of itself - it is what we do with our lives that matters.

So optimism must be qualified. Anyone who studies history will see that minority groups can win rights and acceptance, only for these rights to be removed when the climate changes. Many liberal minded

people still under-estimate the difficulties most lesbian and gay people face, and do not make doing anything about these difficulties a priority.

One of the first and bravest statements on lesbian and gay people from a modern religious perspective was *Towards a Quaker View of Sex* [1963]. [Note 3.] It is sobering to note that collectively, over the last generation, the Society of Friends played little part in winning the wider social and legal freedoms outlined above. Nor have we exerted ourselves against a rising tide of homophobia in other churches, prejudice which expresses itself in active political campaigning. Quakers have, by and large, been loving and accepting within the confines of our own meeting houses - our hearts are often in the right place - but *as Quakers* we have largely been bystanders in the broader struggles for justice, freedom and safety.

The challenge now is whether Friends are happy to continue in that position.

Prejudice affects those we love, as well as ourselves.

When my children were at secondary school, they became aware of homophobic remarks being made constantly by their peer group, such as "the PE teacher's a disgusting dog-breath lezzie". As their mother was by then fully out in the community as a lesbian, this was extremely painful for them. They stopped bringing friends home in case they found out the horrible truth about their mum, and pretended to themselves that this meant that nobody knew, and that they could avoid being a target of bullying themselves.

However, since I was already out, and a number of their school friends had parents who were friends of mine, this was not in fact possible, and for a while it became very difficult to persuade them that

"My ex-husband and I together visited their year tutors to discuss the situation, and were told that nothing could be done about this sort of bullying in view of the continued presence of Section 28 on the statute books"

attending school was a good idea.

My ex-husband and I together visited their year tutors to discuss the situation, and were told that nothing could be done about this sort of bullying in view of the continued presence of Section 28 on the statute books.

Thankfully, the bullying came to a close when the RE teacher expressed some seriously homophobic views about gay men and lesbians in the middle of his class one day. My younger daughter's best friend roundly told him off about his sexism and prejudice, to cheers from the rest of the class, and my daughter came racing home at the end of the day to tell me what an amazing day she had experienced.

Sadly, to this day, both my daughters now aged 22 and 25, have some struggles when it comes to telling their friends about their mum's sexuality, when they want to have them come to stay with us, or to visit.

Another personal story highlights the assumptions people make about us

My parents were socially awkward and reclusive people and had an unhappy marriage. My father died in 1984, essentially of heavy drinking, smoking and depression. My mother was left alone in poor health, almost agoraphobic, and lacking the most basic skills to manage a new single life. She had had an excluding and obsessively destructive relationship with my father which was now gone. After years of emotional distance between us, she began to want to share my life and become dependent on me.

This was a frankly appalling prospect. I had left home in 1977 and had a completely new life as an out gay man involved in gay politics, the peace movement, and Quakerism - all things alien or actively threatening to the small closed lives my parents had led.

A few months after my father's death, my mother's elder brother telephoned me and expressed the view that my duty was

to go back to live with my mother and care for her. I had had virtually no contact with my uncle for many years - my father's alcoholism and both my parents' poverty and social withdrawal had kept most family members away. At this time I had a new partner and had just set up home with him, and pointed this out. My uncle became awkward and made vague references to the possibility of my relationship 'fizzling out'.

I have never seen much of my uncle, before or since these events, but my impression of him is of a shy, gentle, and entirely unmalicious man. But I know that it would never have occurred to him to suggest that I go back to live with my mother if I had been heterosexually married. To him as to millions of other people, gay and lesbian relationships were, and to many still are, essentially unreal and insignificant - nothing more than a peculiar and possibly threatening genital habit. I am sure my uncle wasn't being consciously offensive - it was simply that the most important relationship in my life had no meaning or value to him.

Perhaps even more significantly, I did not point this out or challenge his attitude at the time. I still had too much deference to a senior member of the family and did not feel sufficient indignation at such dismissal of my feelings - not even an out and bolshy gay lefty like me! This is the story of too many lesbian and gay lives - we grow up being taught that the feelings and relationships of people like us are worthless and consequently do not object when people around us act on the same assumption. It is the deadly dance which reinforces and perpetuates the ubiquitous homophobia around us. The deadly dance still needs to be challenged and broken in our meetings and every area of our lives.

I had left home in 1977 and had a completely new life as an out gay man involved in gay politics, the peace movement, and Quakerism - all things alien or actively threatening to the small closed lives my parents had led

My mother died in February 1986, smoking heavily and not eating properly, being cared for by local Social Services. I was doing what I could for her without living with her.

A more mature Friend reflects

Puberty arrived at the age of twelve and doing something with it followed with my first sexual encounter at about fifteen in the late 1940s. I never had any doubt I was gay even before I knew what it actually meant and my sexual orientation has always been exclusively to men, although I have had important emotional relationships with women. Growing up in a large, rather ramshackle (but loving and caring) extended family where the presumption was that everyone got married, I had no idea how to deal with my homosexuality in a family context. The result was confusion, dissimulation and deceit. In retrospect, I realise my family would have been supportive, if troubled, but as an uncertain, gauche and ill-informed teenager I couldn't cope so I turned aside any dangerous questions or, simply, lied. A chance encounter led me to the local YMCA where I met a man, twenty-five years older than myself, from whom I learnt the value of true, disinterested friendship. Our relationship was warm and affectionate but not physical and we became life-long friends; his name was Jim Pirie and I owe him more than I can say. Periods of unthinking sexual promiscuity alternated with two or three profound, enriching and enduring (if no longer sexual) relationships. Now, in (relatively) old age, I can look back on the years the locusts ate from a position of equanimity – no regrets - and remember

I had no idea how to deal with my homosexuality in a family context. The result was confusion, dissimulation and deceit. In retrospect, I realise my family would have been supportive, if troubled, but as an uncertain, gauche and ill-informed teenager I couldn't cope so I turned aside any dangerous questions or, simply, lied.

the happy years with gratitude. W. H. Auden, somewhere, says that nobody, whatever his moral convictions, can honestly regret a moment of physical pleasure as such. What one gets emotionally and, if you're lucky, spiritually, is what counts. Being gay – in either a female or male context – is, in universal terms, of no consequence whatsoever; 'I do not ask what a man believes but how he lives his life'. Gay or not, what you do with your life and how you conduct your relationships is what matters. I have not 'come out' formally in my Meeting although several people in the Meeting know I am gay and I feel no pressing need to declare myself. I want to live in a society, and in a Society of Friends, where being gay is of no more account than having red hair or big feet; like most other people I want to be part of the whole.

Knowing one another

What is the problem?

For lesbians and gay men, orientation is mostly about what we feel, and only secondarily about what we do. At one level, who we are permeates every part of our being - a lesbian might interpret a poem or a painting in a subtly different way from a straight man. At another level, most of us feel our sexuality is only a part of our lives. It is society's attitudes and the vehement hostility of some individuals and groups that is the 'problem'.

In previous generations, lesbians and gay men were encouraged to see their orientation as a sickness or a terrible burden. We do not. We are striving for a wholeness in which our relationships of all kinds, our work, our spiritual practice, our ideas and our communities, our sorrows and our joys, our struggles and our celebrations are one. Understanding our own sexuality is part of that wholeness, as is seeking justice for those society unacceptably treats as different. Most of us genuinely welcome and celebrate our lives and we would not be any other way.

Human attraction and desire is endlessly complex and variable. Some people are attracted only to their own gender, others only to the opposite gender, and some to both. Some people appear to have a genuine measure of choice, and others still experience a change in their desires over time. This complexity of desire and potential for relationships is not properly acknowledged and valued by a society which assumes heterosexuality (emotional and sexual commitment solely to persons of the opposite sex) to be the only appropriate orientation for all.

A watered-down variant of such thinking which has become common in recent times is that ‘it’s all right if we can’t help it’, *i.e.*, same-sex love cannot be a valid *choice*. [Note 4.] In QLGf we feel that this attitude is belittling and irrelevant. We believe that equality and loving responsibility are the final criteria for valuing *any* relationship. [It is interesting that as lesbian and gay people become more open, and assertive, and are better able to express their lives freely, their interest in *why* we might be lesbian or gay has, if anything, declined. Few people really care why someone might be musical, or particularly fond of cats.]

Growing up in a society where positive references to same-sex love are still extremely limited, and hostile attitudes to it extremely common, countless fearful lesbian and gay people become highly skilled at conforming - even down to living as if they were heterosexual, perhaps marrying, and concealing their true feelings. This is unhealthy for them and unfair on some of those they deceive, albeit for understandable reasons.

One of the biggest sources of hope is that, despite hostility at school and misunderstanding at home, more and more young lesbians

It is interesting that as lesbian and gay people become more open, and assertive, and are better able to express their lives freely, their interest in why we might be lesbian or gay has, if anything, declined. Few people really care why someone might be musical, or particularly fond of cats.

and gay men are coming to terms with their sexuality relatively early. To meet a gay or lesbian student, already out and already in a steady relationship, enjoying life, is to see a future where human difference will not be a big issue.

How many of us are there?

It is impossible to know with any certainty the numbers of lesbian and gay people. Different surveys produce wildly different results. People may be afraid to answer honestly, they may have absorbed so much external prejudice that they cannot admit the truth even to themselves, or they may not even understand the question.

One British study in 2001 [Note 5] claimed that the number of women who had had a female sexual partner had almost trebled since 1990 and that the number of men who had had a male partner had practically doubled. The most obvious conclusion to draw is that prejudice and survey methods strongly colour the results and the real figure remains a matter of speculation. Probably these figures merely reflect a greater willingness to be open.

"One British study in 2001 [Note 5] claimed that the number of women who had had a female sexual partner had almost trebled since 1990 and that the number of men who had had a male partner had practically doubled"

In any case, peoples' rights and dignity do not depend on their numbers. No-one argues that Catholics deserve more rights than Jews just because there are more of them - although anti-gay groups regularly argue that gays are so few that their rights do not matter. In fact, there are probably rather more lesbian and gay people than there are churchgoing Anglicans in the UK.

So you are surrounded by lesbian and gay people, whether or not you know them to be such; they work with you, they are members of your Meeting, your neighbours, members of your family, and some will have husbands or wives and children. Through fear of hostility and discrimination, some will be concealing their most important feelings

and relationships from their friends, families, and employers. This has the sad effect of reinforcing the perceptions of those who are hostile to lesbian and gay people. They assume we are secretive due to a sense of shame, or that we are just very few in number. Lesbian and gay people endure in silence ignorant and hateful remarks made about them by people who have no idea they are wounding people far closer to them than they think.

Many heterosexual people also assume that lesbians and gay men can be easily identified, for example that lesbians will be very 'butch' and gay men very effeminate. In fact there is little clear correlation and straight Friends are often surprised when gay and lesbian Friends are pointed out to them.

Two common slurs

It needs repeating that we are certainly not talking about people who assault or seduce children. Most of these are heterosexual men. There is growing understanding of the size of the problem of child sexual abuse and the long term damage it can do to those involved. Yet the revelations of recent years have shown that children sexually abused by adults are overwhelmingly likely to suffer this at the hands of close male relatives. The popular press and other sections of society insist on perpetuating the libel that lesbians and gay men represent a sexual threat to children. This is not only false, but an insult to the thousands of lesbians and gay men who are perfectly good parents.

Nor are lesbians and gay men confined to a few professions. Lesbians and gay men are to be found in large numbers in every area of work. It is just that some sectors - the arts, catering and hairdressing are well-known examples - are marginally - often *very* marginally - less likely to harass lesbian and gay employees for being open. There are *no* professions where openly lesbian and gay people have privileges and even in the liberal professions, they rarely occupy the most senior positions.

How do we organise our lives and relationships?

To quote Gilbert and Sullivan, our capacity for innocent enjoyment is quite the same as that of any other man, or woman. The great advantage of greater openness is that more and more heterosexual people know more and more openly lesbian and gay people. They come to understand, from their lives and relationships, just how absurd the stereotypes are.

A long term loving committed heterosexual relationship could have a sexual side to it, as an important physical expression. No-one would denigrate it by arguing it was *solely* sexual. So too, same gender relationships are about more than what might happen in bed - love, loyalty, mutuality and respect. Indeed it appears that some Friends, who are uncomfortable about celebrating same gender relationships, believe those relationships to be about nothing but genitalia. Some people are so fixated about what lesbian and gay Friends might do in bed, that they cannot look to the relationship as a whole.

Among lesbians and gays, many of us fall in love and form long-term monogamous relationships - many more than the popular media would suggest. Many such couples live together, and many others, through the potential hostility of families, employers or neighbours, do not or cannot. Others form permanent relationships which are sexually less exclusive - one or both partners will be involved in sexual relationships with other friends and acquaintances. Others, through choice or circumstances, may have no established and committed sexual relationships at a given period, and will have sexual contact on occasions with friends and acquaintances or casual partners. Some people, perhaps married, live in isolation from other lesbians and gays. Finally there are those, like some heterosexuals, who choose to live a celibate lifestyle. This is a valid personal choice but we cannot accept that gay and lesbian people are *particularly* called to celibacy. Most of the above experiences may

"Among lesbians and gays, many of us fall in love and form long-term monogamous relationships - many more than the popular media would suggest"

happen to a single person at different periods of his or her life.

One advantage many same gender couples feel is that there is a premise of equality right from the beginning. Two people of the same gender are not plagued by assumptions about polarized and unequal 'roles' with which our sexist society still burdens partners of different genders.

Many lesbian and gay people recognise and value the freedom to negotiate areas of responsibility and mutual support in relationships on their own terms.

Whether there is a single "Quaker View of Sex" that lays down hard rules is a moot point. But we would agree that "sexual morality is an area of challenge and opportunity for living our testimonies to truth, nonviolence, equality, integrity, and love." Quaker Faith and Practice, from 22.11

Can't you separate same gender attraction and sexual activity?

Some people try to argue that same gender attraction is all right, but any sexual activity it leads to is always wrong. This is nonsense on several levels. Same gender sexual activity is like any other - good and worth celebrating if it is a sign of mutual love and respect. To divide attraction from activity requires that lesbians and gay men separate the physical and emotional sides of a relationship, for all time, in a way most heterosexuals would not tolerate for an instant.

"Human sexuality is a divine gift, forming part of the complex union of mind, body and spirit which is our humanity. The sexual expression of a loving relationship can bring delight, joy and fulfilment."

From 22.11 Quaker Faith and Practice

Same-gender love does not equal AIDS

Most people throughout the world who have HIV or AIDS are heterosexual. However, in the West the epidemic has been used to condemn and attack the gay community. Although these attacks are now less vehement, possibly because there are more treatments for the disease, the issue is still used against us from time to time, and

therefore we need to discuss it.

Someone may carry the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) for years without becoming ill. However, HIV can lead to the disease AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), a catastrophic loss of protection from infection. The HIV virus is spread by bodily fluids, i.e. blood and semen, entering another person's body. The danger of transmission during intercourse can be removed by safe sex, primarily the use of strong condoms in penile penetration, or engaging only in non-penetrative sexual behaviour. The idea that AIDS is somehow a 'gay disease' is pernicious nonsense, designed to intensify prejudice in society, and to encourage dangerous complacency among heterosexual people. The spread of HIV and AIDS is not about *with whom* we make love, but *how*.

Globally, HIV is mostly spread by conventional heterosexual intercourse. In the UK, HIV infection has historically been most common among gay men, but this position could easily change. Quite aside from the moral imperative to justice and equality, the acceptance of same-gender love enormously facilitates health education around sexuality, simply because it fosters much greater honesty. Fear, concealment and guilt caused by discrimination and bigotry do not make for safe sexual behaviour. Moreover, the appalling stigma which still attaches to people with HIV and AIDS will be finally removed only by this acceptance of human sexual and emotional diversity. *All* of the sick and dying are equally deserving of our love and care, and as Friends we must all witness to this.

It is alarming to note that according to the Public Health Laboratory Service, (2002), diagnosed HIV infection among both heterosexual and homosexual people continues to rise. HIV and AIDS are still associated with an appalling stigma, and the issue has also been used to target other minority groups such as drug users and asylum seekers. AIDS is also a scourge of almost unimaginable proportions in many parts of the Third World.

[There are contact details for up-to-date information about safe sex in the back of the book.]

But doesn't the Bible say it's wrong?

The Quaker conviction is that authentic religion arises from personal experience, and hence few in the tradition of Britain Yearly Meeting are likely to view Biblical texts, however interpreted, as a final pronouncement on any issue.

Those who are concerned about the above question, however, may wish to consider the following. Many modern scholars believe it is unlikely that the Bible discusses any lesbian and gay relationships, as we understand them today. The Pauline texts in particular which have been used to attack same-gender love were not interpreted in this way until some centuries after they were written.

A generally hostile attitude to homoerotic love does not seem to have developed in Christian theology until well into the Middle Ages. In general, it is worth remembering that the Bible is easily abused. People sometimes cite Biblical texts in support of prejudices they would have held whether the Bible appeared to endorse them or not. They selectively appeal to one element of a Biblical author's writings without considering his other preoccupations authoritative. Many who view Paul's supposed condemnations of homosexuality as final are very unwilling to defend his insistence on the acceptance of slavery, the subjugation of women, or obedience to despotic regimes. There are a variety of excellent books addressing this issue in detail from a variety of theological backgrounds, for those interested. (See our booklist.)

In general, it is worth remembering that the Bible is easily abused. People sometimes cite Biblical texts in support of prejudices they would have held whether the Bible appeared to endorse them or not.

It is extraordinary to find Quakers who quote a small number of Biblical texts against same gender love, often out of context, when they would never resort to the Bible in this way on any other ethical issue.

‘But why do you have to flaunt it?’

Some people are threatened by even the most modest statements about same gender attraction. Modest social chit-chat about a loved partner, membership of a social group, or attending some event, may be attacked as ‘flaunting it’. Mild displays of public affection, or statements of political belief about lesbian and gay people, will certainly be seen as offensive. What is being criticised is lesbian and gay people aspiring to something of the visibility and affirmation which heterosexual people take totally for granted. Most people in a powerful and privileged majority are quite unconscious of the way in which they constantly refer to and affirm their own way of life, and assume that no other experience is valid. Just as the fish who cannot conceive of water, this assumption is so pervasive that many people cannot see it, even when it is pointed out to them.

Typically they may respond by saying ‘I don’t go around saying I’m heterosexual’, as though they need to in a society like ours. Consider the following classic Quaker text:

“But when they saw me stand still, not moving my cap, nor bowing my knee,...they were amazed, and looked first upon one another, then upon me...without a word speaking. At length, the surgeon...clapping his hand, in a familiar way, upon my shoulder, and smiling on me, said, ‘What, Tom, a Quaker!’ To which I readily and cheerfully answered, ‘Yes, a Quaker.’ And as the words passed out of my mouth I felt joy spring in my heart, for I rejoiced that I had not been drawn out by them into a compliance with them, and that I had strength and boldness given me to confess myself to be one of that despised people.”

(from Quaker Faith and Practice 19:16)

Thomas Ellwood had the courage to own his values and experiences, knowing that by concealing them and allowing the assumptions of the world around him in which he had been brought up to pass unchallenged, he would be devaluing them. He owned them to his old friends, moreover, not knowing whether they would react with hostility

and contempt, or worse. Many lesbian and gay people today are as courageous as Thomas Ellwood when they are openly ‘one of that despised people’. They daily make the world a better place for *all* lesbian and gay people, and especially for those for whom visibility is too dangerous. By being known to be lesbian and gay in all their flesh-and-blood three-dimensional ordinariness by those around them, they dispel the grotesque stereotypes often held about lesbian and gay people. The truth has power to set us free.

Why come out?

‘Coming out’ is the crucial process for lesbians and gay men to accept themselves, and to open the way to living a life of truth, integrity, and self-affirmation. Even those with relatively liberal and accepting parents will usually have reached adulthood knowing that same-gender orientation is not their parents’ preferred outcome for them. All lesbian and gay people have seen homophobic bullying even if they have not experienced it. Most information they have received on homosexuality is inaccurate and much of it is hostile. However, we cannot live lives crippled by fear and irrational guilt, nor can we deny ourselves the opportunity for happiness in loving relationships.

Coming out gives strength and courage to others, and affirmation and hope to ourselves. It is the bravery of those who are willing to take the risk of being ‘out’, which has challenged prejudice throughout society, and helped us to win such progress as we have to date. Quakers with their commitment to living their values, and their respect for truth and integrity, should understand this importance.

Open lesbian and gay people benefit everyone. They show that sexuality can be experienced and valued as good in itself. By contributing to an open and accepting atmosphere, they assist those heterosexual

"We cannot live lives crippled by fear and irrational guilt, nor can we deny ourselves the opportunity for happiness in loving relationships. Coming out gives strength and courage to others, and affirmation and hope to ourselves."

people with lesbian and gay relatives and friends who feel they share the stigma imposed upon them by social attitudes.

‘Pride’ is an important word for most lesbian and gay people. By this we mean not arrogance, nor an aggressive attitude towards heterosexuals, and certainly not a blindness to our own faults or those of our groups. Instead it is about asserting our lives and our loves against those who, without knowing us, would condemn us.

But won't the children be influenced if they know about us?

Children are often used as an excuse for expecting lesbian and gay people to remain silent and invisible. Consciously or otherwise, this reflects a belief that same-gender love and attraction are intrinsically corrupt and corrupting - a view that members of QLGf, and other lesbian and gay people who honour their own feelings and relationships, cannot accept. Nor can we agree with a diluted version of this belief which we hear at times - that ‘being like that is all right if you can't help it’ but it's a definite second best to heterosexuality and must be discouraged at all costs.

The fact that some children grow up to be lesbian or gay is ultimately only a problem for those who place genital difference above authentic loving as a criterion for acceptable sexual relationships. Seeing openly lesbian and gay people will probably help children form a more balanced and respectful view, but it won't turn them gay.

Attempting a variety of sexual experience within your peer group is common, virtually regardless of what perceived ‘elders and betters’ might say or do about it. Provided that it is appropriate for their age, always observes the limits of equality in power, mutual consent and respect, and is careful of the health and safety of those concerned, it probably does little harm. ‘Trying on’ homoerotic experience does not make a heterosexual person lesbian or gay, any more than engaging in sexual relations with the opposite sex can ‘turn’ a lesbian or gay person heterosexual. (Lesbian and gay people are surrounded by heterosexual assumptions, role models and propaganda from birth. It does not persuade us to be heterosexual.) There can be little doubt,

however, of the harm that can be done to children arising from angry and censorious reactions from others.

All lesbian and gay people struggle against the constantly negative portrayal of their lives. Compared with ten years ago, there is a wider variety of positive role models for lesbian and gay young people - politicians, artists, musicians and campaigners. Yet it is ordinary adults doing ordinary roles, including parenting, teaching, and childcare, which can be most beneficial and supportive to vulnerable young people.

All children benefit from this positive honesty. They learn to accept and value a large minority of their fellow citizens as equals instead of subjecting them to the hostility and discrimination inherited from the previous generation. They grow up witnessing an object lesson in a priceless Quaker insight - that reflections of the divine love take a dazzling variety of forms, and that joyfully and courageously owning them opens our hearts to more, not less, of the Light.

Of course many lesbian and gay people are parents, whether by previous relationships, or increasingly as a deliberate choice. There is no particular evidence that having gay or lesbian parents makes children more or less likely to be gay or lesbian themselves. It might of course be true that gay or lesbian parents will be less censorious about gay or lesbian relationships in their children's future, than some heterosexual parents. But we see this as wholly good.

"Trying on' homo-erotic experience does not make a heterosexual person lesbian or gay, any more than engaging in sexual relations with the opposite sex can 'turn' a lesbian or gay person heterosexual."

Keeping the sunny side up...

As we have seen, the lives of lesbian and gay people have been revolutionised in the last generation. The isolated lesbian or gay man, tentatively coming to accept herself or himself, can now gain access to the support of other lesbian and gay people in a way unthinkable a generation ago. There has been substantial change even in the last decade.

Partly as a direct response to all the injustices outlined above, and directly inspired by the courage and vision of the Gay Liberation activists of 1970-73, Britain has the most visible and politicised lesbian and gay community in the world outside the United States. The number of bars and nightclubs where lesbian and gay people can be themselves together has increased enormously. This commercial 'scene' serves an important function, but many quieter venues and diverse social groups accommodate those who have other interests.

The struggle against a common oppression creates a strong sense of solidarity amongst many lesbian and gay people. The passage of the infamous Section 28 inspired a renewal of active campaigning for lesbian and gay rights on a scale never envisaged by the Government. The need, due to official indifference, to educate our own community on safe sexual behaviour with the advent of HIV and AIDS has had a similar effect.

Large numbers of lesbians and gay men have happy, successful and long-standing relationships, even though the open acknowledgement and support that heterosexual relationships can largely take for granted may be completely absent. For this reason, heterosexual people often fail to appreciate the exceptional courage lesbians and gay men bring to their relationships and lives in general. Children brought up by openly lesbian and gay parents usually find a loving tolerance and acceptance of their own needs and choices in the sphere of sexuality (*whatever* those are).

It is also worth remembering that progress in the West has not always been matched in the rest of the world. There are still many countries where same gender love is illegal - the penalties may be as severe as death, torture or lengthy imprisonment; where witch-hunts against lesbians and gay men are carried out, often for political reasons; or where unofficial persecutions and murders are clearly encouraged or tolerated by the authorities. All of us should support groups such as Amnesty International, and work towards a world without barbarism, whether on the grounds of race, gender, sexuality, disability or economic status.

Religious and spiritual feeling among lesbian and gay people

We are as interested in these matters as anyone else; the experience of oppression often stimulates a great passion for the ultimate questions of existence. Mainstream society appears to many as shallow, materialistic, devoid of true community and weak on authentic experience. Lesbian and gay people often find ourselves in a similar position in religion to the one we experience in employment. We are everywhere, and always have been, even in the most authoritarian and homophobic sects, but being visible is safer in some places than in others. The Religious Society of Friends is one such place. Its belief that light may come from any quarter and that there is something of God in everyone, can hold a strong attraction for spiritually-minded lesbian and gay people, who value themselves and their relationships, and see these as spiritual gifts like any other.

As we have seen the Society of Friends is moving in the right direction. There are, of course, problems still to be overcome for lesbian and gay Quakers. Many Meetings unconsciously reflect the values of society at large in constantly assuming heterosexuality. Lesbian and gay Friends can feel that their own experiences and loving commitments are marginalized and devalued. Some Friends who consider themselves accepting still harbour unconscious hostility and prejudice. While many white Friends have strong concerns about racism, and affluent ones about poverty, we have seen that heterosexual Friends rarely take a courageous or high profile stand on lesbian and gay rights.

One sometimes hears that accepting gay and lesbian people somehow 'devalues' some other groups of people. This simply reveals the pervasive belief that same gender love is not important. Love, understanding and respect do not make a cake of fixed size, so that more for me somehow means less for you. The 1994 edition of Quaker Faith and Practice goes some way to challenging a rather two-dimensional view of human relationships. It acknowledges those who are single by choice or otherwise, the reality of divorce, and the increasing numbers of opposite gender couples who choose to live

outside traditional marriage. In short it seeks to understand many of the complexities of today's lives for lesbians and gays and heterosexuals, for children and adolescents and adults.

(We must note here that while QLGF strongly supports Quaker Meetings celebrating relationships with a Meeting for Commitment, we do not believe such a celebration is necessary for all, or elevates some relationships in importance above others. All of us are important. We hold the classic Quaker position that an outward form is no guarantee of an inner grace. Of course, given society's hostility and prejudice, the loving acceptance shown by a Meeting for Commitment might be very significant for a particular couple. It also sends an unmistakable message to the world about our values. But not all lesbian and gay Quakers in committed relationships want a Meeting for Commitment.)

In QLGF we acknowledge the Quaker vocation to enter with imagination and sympathy into the joys and sorrows of one another's daily lives, and to strive to know one another in the things which are eternal.

Quaker Lesbian and Gay Fellowship (formerly Friends Homosexual Fellowship) seeks to heighten awareness of all these issues in the Society of Friends. We place a strong emphasis on fellowship, and hope to provide support to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Friends and Attenders and their friends and allies in the context of Quaker values and practice. We invite Meetings to join as supporting members. Our individual membership is open to all in sympathy with Quaker thought, regardless of what label they might use.

The prize ahead is extraordinary. Quakers have never been large in number but they have often been able to achieve great change, through quiet certainty and loving determination. Even with Quaker caution, we have moved further than many in our search for a truly inclusive community, which values each individual, and every responsible loving relationship, for themselves. In our growing sense of the breadth of human sexuality, we have a chance to live lives of radical love and acceptance. What may challenge us though is the

conflict between peace (if by that we mean a quiet life), and justice for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

Postscript: The Editor gets personal

When I began to consider membership of the Society of Friends, I was concerned as to whether my bisexuality was acceptable. Friends seemed welcoming but there were rumblings off about the 'controversial' new Faith and Practice. Were overtly Christian Friends secretly homophobic? How would my suburban family-orientated meeting react?

I asked for a meeting with Elders and two came to my flat for a talk. When I ran my problem past them, the male elder gave a considered reply. He said that I could not expect the Society of Friends to be free of prejudice, because it was a human organisation full of fallible people. What I could expect was that the meeting had a duty to support me against any prejudice and to welcome me for who I was. I found this wise and practical and idealistic all at once, and to be honest, that quiet loving acceptance has been mostly my experience of the Society ever since.

My only specific comment about QLGF is that it is a very Quaker organisation. At our 2003 Spring Gathering, we tore up the agenda to allow most of those attending to join the nearest local meeting in demonstrating against the imminent war in Iraq.

I have encountered prejudice - notably when someone accused me in front of forty other people of being an unprincipled 'entryist' to Quakerism, 'flaunting' my sexuality, and peddling a 'homosexual agenda'. This had come from a relatively mild observation during a discussion of pastoral care, that gay and lesbian people sometimes had somewhat different needs from the majority [which can hardly be denied]. Giving everyone equal respect means sometimes understanding the differences. That accusation was a spur to the revision of this booklet.

There have been several hopeful signs that British Quakers are stirring from their slumbers. Reading Monthly Meeting wrote in support of Jeffrey John, my own monthly meeting confirmed its willingness to celebrate same sex relationships through a Meeting for Commitment, and South Wales Friends took up the cause of transsexual rights. SouthWales MM were able to persuade Meeting for Sufferings, the representative committee of British Quakers, to support the proposed Gender Recognition Bill. What is particularly striking about this last decision was that Friends reached it having heard from those most directly affected, a transsexual Friend and the partner of a transsexual Friend. The view was expressed that Friends should not just support the change in the law but be willing to be seen to do so, challenging the more conservative position taken by other churches. This is a complex issue, but a willingness to listen, to challenge conventional wisdom, and to speak out, make me a bit prouder to be a Quaker than I was a year ago.

I have never regretted joining the Society of Friends, nor have I ever considered those two Elders sold me a false prospectus.

This booklet was in proof when we heard that Quaker Life, a central committee of British Quakers, had written to the Government in support of the civil partnership bill. That support was very welcome, highly significant, and was expressed as follows:

We are responding to your consultation document *Civil Partnership: a framework for the legal recognition of same-sex couples*. We write as Clerks to Quaker Life Central Committee and its Functional Committee on Eldership & Oversight. Quaker Life Central Committee is one of the standing committees of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain and has responsibility for assisting the development of pastoral care. We are glad to support your proposals. Quakers have had a testimony to equality for over 300 years.

“The Quaker understanding of Christianity includes the belief in the equality of all human beings of whatever sex, race, class or age. This is firmly grounded in God’s love for each individual, rather than in social fashion.”

Quaker Faith & Practice 23:73 (1994)

We considered sexual equality, in modern terms, in 1963 with the publication of *Towards a Quaker View of Sex*.

“Where there is genuine tenderness, an openness to responsibility, and the seed of commitment, God is surely not shut out. Can we not say that God can enter any relationship in which there is a measure of selfless love?”

Towards a Quaker View of Sex (1963)

Our Committee on Eldership & Oversight looked at the celebration of committed relationships, regardless of gender, in *Committed Relationships*, published in 2001.

“Celebrating and affirming ‘that of God’ in ourselves and each other must surely mean that we celebrate and affirm the manifestation of that belief in loving and committed relationships and accept the responsibility to encourage and sustain such relationships.”

Committed Relationships (2001)

Quaker Life welcomes your proposals offering same-sex couples equal treatment with opposite-sex couples. We support the balance of equal rights with equal responsibility. We hope these registrations may be mutually recognised within the United Kingdom and outside it. Quaker Meetings in some parts of Britain have already celebrated same-sex commitments in meetings for worship, and more will do so. We have received expression of support for the proposals within the bill to extend this to legal recognition from Nottingham and Derbyshire Monthly Meeting, one of the area groupings of Quaker meetings. We believe that when two people commit themselves to one another before

God, in a meeting for worship, this strengthens their commitment and encourages the Meeting to continue to support it.

We have challenged in this booklet whether Friends are willing to be informed or active on these issues. Therefore, this crucial support for legal rights is grounds for solid optimism and thanksgiving. We hope all British Quakers can unite with these views, and move their witness out of the Meeting House, and into the wider world.

Notes:

Note 1: By *lesbian and gay people* we mean people who feel their primary emotional and sexual commitment and attraction to people of the same sex. The term *lesbian* refers to women in this position, and *gay* to men. Nowadays most lesbians and gay men do not use the term *homosexual*, unless they have to. *Homosexual* was invented by heterosexual psychiatrists in the nineteenth century and came to stigmatize our feelings and relationships, and, like many words in our sexist society, it has come more and more to refer solely to male experience, thus marginalizing women. Crucially, it also reduces us to the purely sexual aspects of our lives and loves, and we are much more than that. The chief virtue of the word *gay* is that we chose it ourselves, but it, too, has come to acquire strongly male overtones in recent years, hence the need to speak more inclusively of *lesbians* and *gays*.

- *Bisexual* people feel both heterosexual and homosexual desire. They may or may not enter into multiple relationships as a result.
- *Transgender* people are those who do not own the gender identity assigned to them by society. *Transsexual* is a narrower term referring to those who want to change to what they see as their 'correct' gender, which may well involve the use of hormones and surgery. Transgender and transsexual issues deserve much more space than we have been able to give them here. While the lesbian, gay and bisexual community and the transsexual community may share some goals and aspirations,

they should not be confused. It is crucial to understand that generally gay men see themselves as men and generally lesbians see themselves as women, and neither group has any desire to be otherwise.

- The term *queer*, originally an insult, is used by some as a more radical sounding term to cover all the above, or, more specifically to refer to the view that all such identities are fluid and wholly socially constructed (thus, queer politics, queer theology, etc.) However many gay and lesbian people still firmly dislike *queer* and it is best avoided unless you are very certain of the context.
- We cannot be accurate, inclusive and elegant all at once so generally we use *lesbian and gay (adjectives) or lesbians and gay men (nouns)*.
- After some argument we use ‘*gender*’ for male and female. The proposed civil partnership law refers to same-sex relationships.
- *Heterosexual* simply refers to those who are primarily attracted to the opposite gender.
- *Homophobia* is the irrational and usually highly emotional prejudice against lesbians and gay men. A linguist would take issue with how the word has been formed but it is the term in general use.

Note 2: Section 28 branded lesbians and gays as ‘pretended family relationships’ and was perhaps the only modern piece of legislation to make spiteful comments about classes of individuals. While it was never enforced in the courts, it encouraged schools not to address issues such as homophobic bullying, and it made it more difficult for lesbian and gay teachers to be out. It created a climate where it only required one of the teachers, the head, the governors, or the parents in a school to be uncomfortable with human sexuality, to create a threat of legal action, or for a teacher to be threatened with dismissal. It remains to be seen whether its disappearance will be replaced by attempts to target gay and lesbian teachers in schools.

Note 3: *Towards a Quaker View of Sex* [1963]. Though striking and important in its time, applauded far beyond the Society of Friends, and with several striking quotes used in the 1994 edition of *Quaker Faith and Practice*, some of TAQVOS has badly dated. QLGf would not want anyone to believe it formed a modern Quaker view of sexual relations. In particular some of its comments about lesbians, a product of the time, seem ignorant by modern standards and now cause offence. It is also, at root, convinced that heterosexual marriage is the ideal. We can honour the bravery of those Quaker pioneers who wrote and defended it, without considering it the last word.

Note 4: The argument we resent can be summarised, cruelly, as follows. “*Since lesbians and gay men are incapable of proper heterosexual relationships, and human nature being what it is, sadly incapable of celibacy, we suppose they ought to be allowed to have sex in private.*” This is quite literally a belief that our lives and relationships are not just second rate but third rate. As to whether lesbian and gay Friends believe their sexuality is a matter of choice, this varies between individuals depending on their experience and personal philosophy. Certainly we all have a choice whether to own our sexuality and use it for good and healthy purposes, or to disown it and see it as something dirty. The claims by anti-gay religious groups, and some therapists, to be able to change sexuality are largely discredited.

Note 5: [Lancet: Vol 358, 9296 1 Dec 2001. A Johnson and others *Sexual behaviour in Britain; partnerships, practices and HIV risk behaviours*] It is also worth noting that questions about sexual activity, even if answered honestly, do not tell us which individuals find their main *attraction* towards their own gender, which is in many ways a more interesting question.

Summer 2005: where are we now?

Discrimination against people in employment on the grounds of their orientation has been banned, with a curious exemption relating to those employed for the purposes of religion. It is worth noting that there is no positive duty to fight discrimination as there is with race.

The Civil Partnerships Act allows a sound legal framework for same gender relationships in the UK. It will both support particular couples, and put into the law the principle that same gender love is worthy of official recognition. There are a number of problems with the specific legislation, it does not give full equality in some major financial matters, and the process is entirely secular, preventing Quakers, for example, for seeking to register loving partnerships in our Meeting Houses. Registration and celebration would have to be done in different places at different times. However it is a historic achievement. Friends should be proud of their support for the Act. A number of Anglican bishops felt able to support the Act, which shows that the churches are far from united in their opposition to LGBT rights.

The Gender Recognition Act allows the first transsexuals legally to adopt their preferred gender this year.

Issues remain in housing, access to fertility treatment, and family law. There is also a big gap between law and practice until test cases have been won, policies updated and attitudes changed. However, the legal position for lesbian and gay people has changed remarkably even in the last two years.

Quakers still need to digest these changes. Many meetings and charities may not have thought through the implications of our position, and the changing law.

With a few honourable exceptions, the other denominations stick to an official position, which makes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people second, or third class worshippers, to the frustration of millions of their more enlightened members.

Booklist: further reading

Central Quaker publications

- *Quaker Faith and Practice* (Advices and Queries, Chapter 22)
- *Committed Relationships* [2001], The Committee on Eldership and Oversight, Friends House
- *A Minority of One*- Harvey Gillman. The 1988 Swathmore Lecture addresses issues of difference.

More information on Quakerism including a free book can be obtained from Friends House, 173-177 Euston Rd, London NW1 2BJ tel 020 7663 1000. www.quaker.org.uk

Other Quaker publications

QLGF:

- *Part of the Rainbow* 2004 (replacing *Speaking our Truth* 1993)
- *Preparing for the New Age* - Zoe White
- *Like Trees Walking* - Jackie Leach Scully [a geneticist looks sceptically at the gay gene controversy]
[These and an information pack available from the QLGF National Contact, 46 the Avenue, Starbeck, Harrogate, HG1 4QD qlgfcontact@btclick.com]

Nine Friends Press

- *This we can say* - a challenging exploration of sexual issues by a mixed (lesbian, gay, heterosexual) group of Friends. Mostly based on personal experience it includes some challenging Queries.

Biblical and theological publications

Lesbian and Gay Christians (formerly L+G Christian Movement) has an extensive booklist. [LGCM, Oxford House, Derbyshire St, London WE2 6HG. 020 7739 1249. www.lgcm.org.uk]. But we recommend:

- *Living in Sin*, John Selby Spong. Probably the most readable run through what the Bible says about sex and how far it matters, from an American Anglican heterosexual bishop.
- *Homophobia and the Bible: a self defence manual*. Michael Halls, In Other Words Publishing. A short readable and well informed run through some of the issues.

More specialist material

- *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, by L William Countryman. A very detailed examination of what the Bible says about a very wide range of issues of sex and gender.
- *Lesbian and Gay Theologies*. Renowned Lesbian Roman Catholic theologian Elisabeth Stuart reviews the history of lesbian and gay theologies and comes to some challenging conclusions.

Lesbian and Gay Lives

Terry Sanderson, from a non-religious perspective, has written a number of sensible books about gay and lesbian assertiveness and self-esteem, and helping heterosexual families to understand their gay offspring. These include *How to be a happy homosexual*, *A stranger in the family*, and *How to make gay relationships work*.

Organisations

Lesbian and Gay Christians: (see above)

[QLGF can provide up to date contacts for other LGBT groups - for specific Christian denominations, or Jewish, Muslim, etc]

LGBT rights around the world: Amnesty International LGBT wing. “In 2001, 70 countries still had laws making same sex love illegal.”

Lesbian and Gay rights: one campaigning organisation providing information on current campaigns is Stonewall, 46 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0ED. 020 7881 9440. www.stonewall.org.uk Has Scottish and Welsh offices.

Transsexual rights: Press for Change, postal address BM Network, London WC1N 3XX, www.pfc.org.uk [QLGF will provide the latest contact for the informal Quaker transsexual group]

Information on HIV/AIDS and safe sex: Terence Higgins Trust, 52-54 Grays Inn Rd, London WC1X 8JU. 020 7831 0330. www.tht.org.uk Their helpline is 0845 1221 200 and this is open 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, 12-6 Sat-Sun.

Notes:

“Quakers were one of the first churches to talk openly about sexuality. Since we try to live out lives respecting ‘that of God’ in everyone we would want to treat all people equally. We feel that the quality and depth of feeling between two people is the most important part of a loving relationship, not their gender or sexual orientation.”

Britain Yearly Meeting website (Sept 2003)

Many Quakers today of all orientations affirm the equal value of lesbian, gay and bisexual people and relationships, in a world which still directs considerable hostility and discrimination at them. Many lesbian and gay Friends find their loving relationships, and their witness to lesbian and gay equality, lived out in a spiritually welcoming atmosphere.

However, the silence and invisibility with which our world surrounds same gender love creates large gaps in knowledge about lesbian and gay lives even among those non-gay Friends who want to be supportive. Equally, a sense of inadequate knowledge and understanding often explains the reluctance of others to accept lesbian and gay relationships.

Quaker Lesbian and Gay Fellowship offers ***Part of the Rainbow*** - a thorough revision of our 1993 title ***Speaking our Truth***. It aims both to be a brief introduction to lesbian and gay experience in general to those Quakers who recognise the need to be better informed, and to be a summary of the dramatic changes in Western society in recent years. It shows the persistence of social and legal oppression but it offers positive insights from the experience of lesbian and gay people.

£3.50