The Exemplar Project: Finding What Makes a Church Exemplary in its Ministry to Persons who Experience Same-Sex Attraction or who Struggle with Sexual Identity Concerns

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The purpose of the Exemplar Project was to explore approaches used by church-based ministries that are considered exemplary in their outreach or ministry to persons who experience same-sex attraction or who struggle with sexual identity concerns. Twenty-eight church-based ministries and one stand-alone parachurch ministry were nominated as exemplary. Of these, 14 completed an on-line survey that asked specific questions about their ministry vision, goals, demographics, and leadership structure. A typology of three types of church-based ministries emerged from the data: ministry to brokenness, welcoming but not affirming, *and* gay affirmative. *Although there are significant differences among ministries in theological doctrine, they have much in common, including being under-resourced and often invisible within their own communities, as well as sharing interest in assisting persons who are sorting out sexual identity conflicts.*

One of the many practical considerations for Christians who experience same-sex attraction or who have a homosexual orientation is finding a church setting within which they can worship. Their own attractions conflict with a Christian view of heterosexuality as normative, an understanding drawn first from the creation narrative and what has historically been viewed as the revealed will of God with respect to heterosexual sexuality and sexual expression (Love, Bock, Jannarone & Richardson, 2005; Yarhouse & Nowacki, 2007). Today, of course, we see much more heterogeneity among Christian denominations regarding homosexuality. Many mainstream religious denominations are revisiting these understandings of sexuality and the morality of same-sex behavior. Some distinguish between a homosexual orientation and its expression, while others are explicitly gay affirmative (e.g., Metropolitan Community Church).

The conflict can be particularly complex when Christians who experience same-sex attraction hold to orthodox teaching on human sexuality and sexual expression. They may believe in the traditional understanding of sexual ethics, but still find the local church to be a community that is unwelcoming to them, even if they are trying to live faithfully before God.

For sexual minorities seeking a conservative Christian church, the implementation of doctrine creates several challenges for sexual minorities by fostering a climate that truly tests whether moral proscriptions can be held while offering hospitality to those who experience same-sex attraction (the "hate the sin but love the sinner" phrase that is ubiquitous in some conservative religious circles).

Beckstead and Morrow (2004) state that persons who hold conservative religious values may have difficulty incorporating same-sex sexuality into their lives due to what is taught and modeled in their religion. Of course, from a gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) perspective, incorporating same-sex sexuality means accepting one's attractions as part of God's diverse creation that are to be valued and embraced by the person and to be expressed in same-sex relationships (Yarhouse & Tan, 2004). Such a view would be expressed, for example, by the Metropolitan Community Church or other gay-affirmative religious groups:

> The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches is a Christian Church founded in and reaching beyond the Gay and Lesbian Communities. We embody and proclaim Christian salvation and liberation,

Christian inclusivity and community, and Christian social action and justice. We serve among those seeking and celebrating the integration of their spirituality and sexuality. (www.mcchurch.org, Mission Statement)

Mainstream psychology increasingly portrays conservative Christianity as irreparably problematic for sexual minorities. A consistent message is to encourage the distinction between religion and spirituality, so that GLB persons can leave the organized religion they grew up with while retaining a vital spirituality that can itself be nurtured (Grant & Epp, 1998; Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Grant and Epp went as far as to portray conservative or traditional religion as "pathological religion" (p. 32), one that when encountered by a mental health professional, must be responded to with empathy.

These recommendations are understandable when the conflict is viewed through the lens of a gay-affirmative approach. But such an approach fails to fully appreciate the religious perspectives often held by sexual minorities themselves (Wolkomir, 2006; Yarhouse & Tan, 2004). For example, in a recent climate survey of three Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) member institutions (Yarhouse, Stratton, Dean & Brooke, 2007), 104 sexual minorities were asked what recommendations they had for their institution and for the local church. Many suggestions were offered and focused primarily on finding ways to demonstrate love to sexual minorities and finding ways to engage the topic more openly. These suggestions were provided by sexual minorities, the vast majority of whom were conservative in terms of a Christian sexual ethic.

These findings are consistent with an earlier qualitative study of 14 young adult sexual minorities (some of whom identified as gay, some of whom did not) who offered their thoughts on what they would have liked from Christianity (Yarhouse, Brooke, Pisano, & Tan, 2005). These suggestions included open communication (about homosexuality), acceptance, resources, and accountability. These same participants shared how Christianity harmed them – the primary themes were lack of support and guilt and shame.

The challenge remains as to how local churches can minister effectively to sexual minorities. Certainly, some churches want to minister and reach out to sexual minorities, but may find it difficult to do so. Church leaders often want to know what kinds of outreach or ministry other churches provide or which churches are doing good work in this area.

The present investigation is a study of church-based ministries that are exemplary, or worth imitating, in their outreach or ministry to the community of persons who experience same-sex attraction or who struggle with sexual identity concerns. The purpose of this study was to explore this area of ministry and to learn how churches provide services to this population. Through this project, it was our hope to better understand and assess what makes a church-based ministry exemplary in its work with persons who experience same-sex attraction; identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; or who have sexual identity concerns.

METHOD

The current study was born in response to the requests from pastors and church leaders to know what they could do to minister to individuals with sexual identity concerns in their congregations. The Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity (ISSI) has received requests for consultations with various church bodies to address the issues faced by individuals who experience same-sex attraction as well as the issues churches may face in ministering to them. These petitions for help in understanding how to best minister to this population prompted ISSI to hold a forum for local area pastors and a focus group discussion at a regional conference for pastors, lay-leaders, and individuals with same-sex attractions. These two preliminary events were the catalysts for this project as it further investigated how churches are offering ministry and outreach services to persons who experience same-sex attraction or who struggle with sexual identity concerns.

Due to the relative under-representation of studies about this population, primarily descriptive statistics and qualitative methodology were employed. Qualitative methodology is deemed appropriate for analyzing relatively unexplored research questions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), and in this study, qualitative methodology allowed respondents to share details about their church-based ministries.

Participants

Twenty-eight church-based ministries and one stand-alone, parachurch ministry across the continental United States were nominated as exemplars. Ministry personnel from 14 of the 29 nominees responded to the request to complete the online survey, yielding a response rate of 48.28%.

The ministry leaders who participated in this project were asked some general questions about the church to which they belonged. They were asked about church membership, church location, and the number of paid staff. One of the churches (7.14%) had a membership of between 0-300. Three of the churches (21.43%) had 300-500 members. Two (14.29%) had 500-1,000 members. Four of the churches (28.57%) had 1,000-3,000 members. Three of the churches (21.43%) had 7,000-15,000 members. And the final church (7.14%) had more than 15,000 members. The locations of the

churches ranged from rural (n=1, 7.14%), to suburban (n=7, 50%), to urban (n=6, 42.86%).

In regards to the number of paid staff for the churches, one of the churches (7.14%) had 0-5 staff, 5 (35.71%) had 6-10 staff, and 1 (7.14%) had 11-15 staff. On the other hand, 2 churches (14.29%) had 20-30 staff, another 2 (14.29%) had 30-50 staff, and the final 3 (21.43%) had more than 50 paid staff members.

Procedure

Church-based ministries were nominated as exemplary by third-party persons solicited through religiously-identified listserves and postings on web sites. Additionally, churches were nominated by word of mouth and the "snowball" technique (i.e., a gatekeeper was told about the study who then solicited participants for the researchers and other participants were invited to share about the study with would-be participants). The announcement identified *church exemplars* as "churches that provide ministry to persons who experience same-sex attraction or are sorting out sexual their sexual identity." The announcement then also defined *exemplary* as "a person or thing worth imitating; good model or pattern" or "an archetype" and *to minister* as "to attend to the needs of others, to give aid."

After a church was nominated by an individual, the research coordinator contacted the church via email and telephone to inform the church leader that someone had nominated the church as being one worth emulating in regards to how it ministers to individuals who experience same-sex attraction. The ministry representative was asked to participate in an online web survey and provided with the appropriate URL link.

The study progressed in two phases. In phase 1, research participants completed an on-line set of questions that inquired about the ministry in their churches. In phase 2 of the project, 5 ministries were selected and asked if they would allow the research assistant to visit them to learn more about the ministry first-hand. Four of the 5 churches contacted about further face-to-face interviewing agreed to the visit, the fifth church agreed to a telephone interview. The research assistant visited the church ministries to ask follow-up questions, observe ministry activities and facilities, and interact with staff.

Data Analysis

Several questions were open-ended and allowed respondents to share information about their ministries in a descriptive manner. These items were downloaded from the secure website to an Excel spreadsheet, and the researchers analyzed the data independently and met to review the themes that emerged from their read-ing of the data. This resulted in several broad themes for answers to each item. If needed, the researchers could re-review the data independently and convene again until consensus was reached on all items. A similar method was employed to develop subthemes. The researchers reviewed the data independently and developed subthemes from the themes, and these were reviewed together so that the researchers could discuss the various subthemes. If needed, the researchers could re-review the data independently and convene again until consensus was reached on all subthemes.

RESULTS

Quantitative data

The results of the survey revealed valuable information about the means, methods, and models of church-based ministries seeking to reach out to and support individuals who experience same-sex attractions; identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; or have sexual identity concerns.

Participants and Target Populations of the Church-Based Ministries. All 14 ministry leaders noted that their churches serve "people who experience same-sex attraction (but do not identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual)." Moreover, 13 of the respondents (92.86%) also indicated that they minister to "individuals with sexual addictions (e.g., pornography or compulsive masturbation)." Ten of the 14 (71.43%) churches minister to "openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals." Eight of the churches (57.14%) minister to "parents/spouses of someone who experiences same-sex attraction or identifies as gay, lesbian or bisexual," and 4 (28.57%) indicated that they work with transgendered individuals. Of the 9 churches (64.29%) that noted that they also work with "Others," 3 expanded their service to anyone desiring it; and the other 6 churches indicated serving various groups ranging from survivors of childhood sexual abuse to abusers of alcohol and other substances.

When asked about the age ranges of the people to whom they minister, all 14 church leaders indicated that they work with young adults between the ages of 18-29 and adults 30-54 years of age. Half of the churches (50%) indicated that they also work with older adults 55-80 years of age. Additionally, 7 churches (50%) noted that they work with adolescents between the ages of 13-17. However, only 3 of the 14 churches (21.43%) noted that they work with children between the ages of 5-12.

It may seem obvious that a church with a larger congregation would serve more individuals in their outreach and support ministries; however, our findings did not necessarily fully support this notion. Five of the 14 churches (35.71%) noted that they serve or minister to more than 50 people a week. Two of these five

churches reported having 300 to 500 members in their congregations. Whereas one of the other churches had 500 to 1,000 members, another had 7,000 to 15,000, and the final one had more than 15,000 congregants. Two churches (14.29%) indicated that they serve 21 to 50 individuals in a week's time; their congregations were 500 to 1,000 and 1,000 to 3,000 people strong. Three of the respondents (21.43%) noted that they minister to 16 to 20 weekly. The size of one of these congregations fell between 1,000 to 3,000 members. The other two indicated having memberships of 7,000 to 15,000 people. Two other respondents (14.29%) noted that their ministries serve 11 to 15 individuals a week. One of these churches had 0 to 300 members whereas the other had 1,000 to 3,000 congregants. One other ministry leader (7.14%) indicated serving 6 to 10 individuals in a church with 1,000 to 3,000 congregants. One respondent (7.14%) noted that the church he represents, which had 300 to 500 members, ministers to 0 to 5 individuals a week. As these results show, the size of the church may not necessarily positively influence the number of individuals served each week. In other words, a church with thousands of congregants may not necessarily serve a lot of people in their ministry to individuals experiencing sexual identity concerns.

The ministry personnel were also asked to describe the guidelines that the participants of their ministries would need to follow, if there were such guidelines. Nine (64.29%) of the 14 churches indicated that they did indeed have guidelines or rules for their participants to adhere to in order to receive services. The types of guidelines ranged from simple, open-ended style guidelines to itemized lists of expectations and requirements. Many of the church-based ministries with guidelines for their participants noted that confidentiality and sincerity of heart were important considerations for their participants.

An example of an open-ended guideline is as follows: "They must just simply come and receive. Everything is there for them...we make it easy to come and receive." Whereas other guidelines included more specific tenets: "We expect that individuals to not harass or exploit other members for their own purposes. Our foundation raises the question, in what relationships is sex appropriate? We move forward from there, engaging in conversation and in jouney [sic] with individuals."

Others expressed more specific and stringent regulations. For example, one ministry wrote the following:

> 1. No smoking, alcohol, drugs, or inappropriate use of over-the-counter medications. All prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, depressants, stimulants, and diet drugs need to be discussed with your mentor.
> 2. Healthy emotional and physical boundaries are essential. Therefore, there is to be no sexual/emotional misconduct. Any temptations, fantasies, attractions, or dreams should be discussed with your mentor. Sexual misconduct includes viewing pornography, visiting an adult bookstore, emotional dependency, voyeurism, stalking, masturbation, or any sexual contact with another person.
> 3. Ongoing disrespect for the program, dishonesty, lack of participation, and disregard for one's mentoring relationship may result in probation or dismissal. 4. While in the program, participants may not have contact with anyone involved in unrepentant emotional dependencies or inappropriate sexual behaviors. … 9. Participants are required to attend all men's and women's events. 10. Participants are required to set up all personal computers with internet accountability. … 13. It is necessary for participants to lean into and receive counsel from mentors and leaders (e.g., clothing, finances, schedule, social interactions, peer relationships). 14. During the length of the program, no alone one-on-one time will be spent with the opposite sex, or if dealing with SSA, no one-on-one time will be spent with any other individual also dealing with SSA, unless approved by [Program] Director. … 20. If participant is married, participant agrees to follow all additional guidelines set up by leaders and spouse. 21. Participants agree to discuss all media usage and preferences with mentors, and abide by boundaries set by mentors. (e.g., games, concerts, etc.). … 24. Participants agree not to breach other participants' confidentiality. 25. If participants have been sexually active outside of marriage, it is required that they be tested for sexually transmitted diseases. 26. Participants agree to become members of [Church hosting ministry].

Services Provided. The ministry leaders were asked to choose what types of services either they or their ministry offers. They chose one or more from the following list: 1-on-1 counseling, support groups, Bible studies, mentoring/discipleship, training, speaking engagements/consultation, conference hosting, referral to mental health professionals, and other (please specify). Nearly 86% of the church ministries surveyed (12 of the 14 churches) offered referrals to mental health professionals. Ten church ministries (71.43%) offered 1-on-1 counseling, and 10 offered support groups. Furthermore, over half (57.14%) of the churches

noted that they offered mentoring and/or discipleship. Seven of the churches put forward trainings, and 7 of the leaders offered speaking engagements or consultation services. Slightly less than half of the surveyed churches (42.86%) offered Bible studies specifically for these individuals and host conferences related to sexual identity concerns. Four of the churches marked that they provide other services like residential counseling programs and referrals to healing ministries or specific addictions groups.

Leaders were also asked to identify those services, from the list above (plus one additional option of HIV/AIDS hospice volunteers), that they or their ministry offered in the area of their town or city where individuals who identify as gay predominantly reside, work, or recreate. Twelve of the churches responded to this question; half of which indicated that they offered no services directly in the "gay section" of their towns, and one other noted in the "other" category that he was unsure of the meaning of the question. Thus, of the 5 churches offering services in the proximity of many known gay-identified individuals, 3 churches run support groups, 3 held Bible studies, 3 offered mentoring/discipleship opportunities, and 3 leaders conducted speaking engagements/consultation. For example, one respondent indicated that the church ministry this individual led offers support groups, Bible studies, mentoring/discipleship, speaking engagements/consultation, and referrals to mental health professionals. In contrast, a different church leader specified offering 1-on-1 counseling and speaking engagements/consultation in the predominantly gay section of town.

Fees for Services. Respondents indicated in whole dollar amounts what their charges are for the services they offered. Four of the ministry leaders indicated charges of $20, $35, $80, and $90 per session for 1-on-1 counseling. The mean cost per session was $56.25. Three of the ministries offered support groups for which two of them charge $150, and the third $275. Two ministries indicated costs for their trainings and speaking engagements. One of these leaders charged $50 and the other $300 for these services. Lastly, one ministry charged $50 for additional materials not covered by the costs of the ministry programs. Six of the 14 ministries surveyed indicated that they did not charge any fees for the services offered, and one respondent skipped the question.

Ministry Leadership. The ministry personnel responding to the survey were asked detailed questions regarding their leadership teams, the style and organization of the ministry leadership, and the requirements for their leaders. In regards to the individuals running the everyday operations of the ministries surveyed, 4 of the respondents noted that multiple people run their ministries, which may have consisted of any combination of the following: a staff pastor, a staff counselor, volunteer mental health provider, another staff member, or volunteer layperson(s). Of the 10 churches that are run by a single leadership person, 4 of them were run by pastors on staff with the churches, another 4 were run by lay volunteers, and 2 were run by a staff psychologist or counselor. Overall, half of the sample indicated that a staff pastor was intricately involved in the daily operation of their ministries; furthermore, nearly 36% of the ministries had laypersons concerned with the ministries' daily functioning.

The respondents were asked if the individual(s) running the everyday operations of their ministries personally experienced same-sex attraction or identified as gay. One of the participants skipped the question. However, 7 (50%) of the sample indicated that their ministries were not run by someone who experiences attractions to persons of the same-sex. The remaining 6 (42.86%) church-based ministries had people who have (or have had) same-sex attractions or identify (or have identified) as gay or lesbian running the everyday operations of their ministries.

Working leaders, including small group leaders and other lay leaders, are many times the leaders involved in weekly events, discipleship, Bible studies, and so on. Participants were asked how many working leaders their ministries had as well as the guidelines these leaders needed to follow. Eight of the churches (57.14%) had 0 to 5 of these leaders, and 2 (14.29%) of them had 6 to 10 working leaders. The remaining 4 churches (28.57%) had more than 20 working leaders. These working leaders had guidelines as simple as a "calling and passion from the Lord to serve the LGBT community" to more complex ones such as: "1) Purity, 2) Church involvement, 3) Screening, 4) Training, 5) Submission to supervision, 6) Ministry Involvement (on-the-job training), 7) Christian, 8) Leadership ability (or experience), 9) Certification (in some areas), 10) Commitment." One of the respondents noted that their ministry did not have any guidelines due to not having enough leaders, and a second stated that due to the nature of this ministry guidelines were not applicable.

Budgets, Publicity, and Events. The ministry representatives were asked about the general operations and marketing for their particular ministry. The average yearly budget for thirteen of the fourteen respondents ranged from no budget to more than $5,000 a year. One respondent skipped this question. Three (21.43%) had no budget, 1 (7.14%) had a budget of $0-$500, 1 had a budget of $1,000-$2,000, 3 (21.43%) had budgets of $2,000-$5,000, and 5 of the church ministries (35.71%) had budgets of more than $5,000 a year. In terms of marketing, nearly 29% of the respondents noted that they did not publicize their

ministry in their church bulletin, another nearly 29% only advertised once a quarter or less in their bulletins. Slightly more than 7% of the churches advertised either every other month or once a month. In contrast, nearly 21.5% of the churches had notices about their ministries in their bulletins weekly. The remaining respondent skipped the question.

In addition to noting how often the church publicized information in their Sunday bulletin about their ministry to persons who experience same-sex attraction, ministry leaders were asked about other ways their services are marketed. Respondents chose from eight marketing options with frequencies ranging from "do not use this medium" to "more than once a week". Five of the 14 churches (35.71%) noted that they provide information in their church newsletter once a month or once a quarter. Nine of the churches (64.29%) had brochures available more than once a week, weekly, once a month, or every other month. Four ministries (28.57%) ran an information table open more than once a week, weekly, or once a quarter or less. Seven of the churches (50%) had verbal announcements during their Sunday services ranging from weekly, to once a month, or once a quarter or less. Two of the churches (14.29%) ran ads in their local newspapers, on the radio, and/or on local television stations either once a month or once a quarter or less. Four of the ministries (28.57%) announced their events during denominational or multi-church/associational meetings once a quarter or less. Ten of the 14 churches (71.43%) had websites that announced ministry events either more than once a week or once a quarter or less. Five of the ministries had email announcements that went out more than once a week, every other week, once a month, every other month, or once a quarter or less.

Another way of marketing a ministry is by hosting or attending additional events. Participants were asked about the frequency with which their ministries sponsor or participate in additional events. Two of the ministry representatives (14.29%) did not respond to this query, another 2 (14.29%) noted that they do not participate or sponsor other events, and an additional 2 (14.29%) noted that they only do so less than once a year. Whereas 5 (35.71%) of the ministries either sponsored or participated in additional events 1 to 2 times a year and 3 (21.43%) of them did so 3 to 6 times a year.

The final question related to marketing asked about ministry affiliations. Nine of the ministries (64.29%) were affiliated with a national or umbrella organization. However, 4 (28.57%) of them were not, and one ministry representative skipped the question. Of the 9 ministries that were affiliated with outside organizations, 56% of them were affiliated with either Exodus International or Exodus North America, and 22% with Desert Streams Ministries. The remaining 22% were affiliated with other organizations.

Qualitative Data

Description of Ministry. We asked participants the following: "Please describe your ministry to persons who experience same-sex attraction." All of the participants responded to this item, and their responses were organized under the following themes: *Same-Sex Attraction as Unwanted Struggle* (6 ministries); *Relationship with Christ* (5 ministries); *Acceptance of Person* (4 ministries); and *Wholeness/Restoration* (4 ministries).

As an example of Same-Sex Attraction as Unwanted Struggle, one participant shared: "What we offer at this time is one-on-one counseling and support groups for those struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions."

Five ministries emphasized *Relationship with Christ*. An example was, "We want to create space for the individual to be authentic and honest about their sexual attractions toward the same sex and provide them with a means of building their relationship with Christ."

Four ministries indicated an emphasis on *Acceptance of the Person*. An example of that was, "We show acceptance and welcome these persons into worship just as we do anyone else."

Finally, *Wholeness/Restoration* was a theme shared by 4 ministries. One wrote, "[A] Christ-centered support group offering hope and restoration to men and women impacted by homosexuality and other gender identity-related issues."

Mission/Vision. We asked participants to describe their mission statement or vision for ministry ("What is the mission statement or vision of your ministry?"). Six themes emerged from the qualitative data: *Healing and Health* (10 ministries); *Jesus as Central to Healing* (6 ministries); *Love/Acceptance/Compassion* (6 ministries); *Creating a Space* (for issues to be addressed) (4 ministries); *Education and Equipping* (4 ministries); and *Creating/Being Community* (2 ministries).

With the theme of *Healing and Health*, one participant shared the following: "We are here to bring healing to all people, teaching them the truth about our God and His love for them."

In the area of *Jesus as Central to Healing*, one participant shared "We believe that true wholeness and purity is only possible with an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ."

Love/Acceptance/Compassion was another emergent theme represented by 6 of the ministries. One participant indicated the following: "We are committed to providing an atmosphere of unconditional love, acceptance and support through this ministry."

Four of the ministry leaders indicated a theme of *Creating a Space* that is safe for individuals to address their issues or concerns. One respondent noted: "Our purpose is to create an environment for the healing of any sense of separation that may exist between homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender and heterosexuals."

Education and Equipping of ministry participants as well as the Church as a whole was the fifth theme to emerge from the mission/vision statements of the represented ministries. One respondent stated it as such: "We educate and equip the Body of Christ to provide healing for the sexually broken and support for family and friends while assisting those with unwanted sexual struggles."

The final theme to surface was of *Creating/Being Community*. Of the 2 ministries to indicate this theme, one respondent noted: "Community: As a ministry within the body of [our Church], we value creating and fostering a context for authentic Christian community."

Advice to Other Churches. We asked the following question: "If you could give advice to another church on how to minister to individuals who experience same-sex attraction or have sexual identity concerns, what would you say?" Four themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data: *Safe Place* (5 ministries); *Leadership* (4 ministries); *Training/Supervision* (4 ministries); and *Loving People Where They Are* (2 ministries).

Regarding the theme of *Safe Place*, one participant offered the following: "If the leaders of the church don't make it a safe place to tell the 'truth' about personal struggles, whatever the struggles are, then it would be difficult to minister to hurting bro and sis."

Four ministries indicated the importance of *Leadership*. For example, one participant shared, "Build a leadership team of individuals who truly have a missionary's heart for this issue and will commit to praying without ceasing."

Training/Supervision was also a theme emerging from four of the ministries. These respondents noted that prospective leaders for a ministry to individuals who experience sexual identity concerns or have same-sex attractions would do well to obtain training or supervision from a respected source. One such participant aptly stated: "Go somewhere and intern or train."

With the theme of *Loving People Where They Are*, a participant shared the following: "Reach out, love and accept all who come through your doors."

Improvements. We asked participants about aspects of their ministry they would like to improve. The question was, "What are some things about your ministry that you feel are not exemplary?" Two themes emerged from the responses to this question: Financial (4 ministries) and Public Relations (4 ministries). For example, one ministry discussed Financial by sharing: "We are always terribly low on financial support and funding, especially when it comes to youth." As an example of Public Relations, one participant shared: "We have not done a good job of letting our community know of our openness to all people. We rely probably on word-of-mouth too much."

DISCUSSION
A Typology of Churches
The fourteen churches that responded to the online survey can be categorized into having three types of ministries: *ministry to brokenness, welcoming but not affirming,* and *gay affirmative*.

Ministry to brokenness. The churches holding to the ministry to brokenness model were traditionally evangelical churches that tend to maintain a ministry model supporting the view of same-sex attraction and homosexuality as evidence of human brokenness in need of healing. Eight of the 14 churches (57.14%) fell into this category. A typical description of one of these church ministries could be summarized by the following response:

> Our ministry is committed to helping men and women who seek healing in areas of sexual and relational brokenness. It is aimed to help those struggling with the effects of sexual abuse, sexual promiscuity or sexual addiction, homosexuality, co-dependency, or self-hatred. Thankfully, Christ's capacity to touch and restore us at deep levels of shame and brokenness extends to all of us, regardless of the specifics of our issue.

Welcoming but not affirming. The welcoming but not affirming churches seemed to hold several commitments simultaneously. One commitment, to be hospitable and accepting, demonstrated an understanding that the church needs to be a place that is open for all to enter and find a safe place to seek closer relationships with God. Another commitment was to not waver from orthodox understanding of scripture, by which they asserted a traditional Christian sexual ethic. There were 4 churches (28.57%) that fell into this category. A respondent from an open and accepting church described their church as follows:

> [Our church] does not have a specific ministry to persons who experience same-sex attraction. The main way same-sex attraction is approached through individual relationships and statements (when it fits) within the sermon. We maintain a biblical view that having a sexual relationship with someone of the same sex is sin and not fulfilling the victorious life available in Christ. We show acceptance and welcome these persons into wor-

ship just as we do any one else.…SSA [sic] is usually listed with other areas of struggle such as substance abuse, anger, depression, infidelity, etc.

And another one simply stated: "We are a small family-oriented church in California. Our focus is love and acceptance of ALL people, regardless of their life choices."

Gay-affirmative. The churches considered gay affirming or "pro-gay" have philosophies and theologies that deviate from traditionally orthodox understandings of Scripture, or find support for same-sex relationships within the Bible. Thus, they tend to facilitate the integration of same-sex attractions into gay identities while also providing a venue for Christian growth and worship. Two of the churches (14.29%) responded in this fashion. A description of this type of church is best captured by the following response:

> Our purpose is to create an environment for the healing of any sense of separation that may exist between homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender and heterosexuals at [our church] and the greater community, and to heal any personal sense of separation that may appear within lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender individuals. We are here to anchor the consciousness of Wholeness and reveal and celebrate our oneness in God; to fully realize that each is a unique and perfect expression of God and to embrace and empower the many gifts this facet of God reveals. We are committed to providing an atmosphere of unconditional love, acceptance and support through this ministry, thereby uplifting us all to fully express as God has ordained through every sexual, affectional [sic] or gender preference/orientation.

Shared Themes

In addition to the typology of ministries revealed through this study, it is important to note that the various themes emerging from the qualitative data were at times shared by any of the three types of churches. For instance, all three types shared the theme of *Healing and Health* that came out of the mission or vision statements of the church ministries. The advice of creating a *Safe Place* where people can be open and authentic was shared by ministries with a *ministry to brokenness model* and the *welcoming but not affirming* type. Hence, the presumption that any one of the particular types of church-based ministries we found would be the only one to advise other leaders in a certain direction, like getting training, for instance, would be in error. Additionally, a gay-affirmative church-based ministry may share beliefs that a ministry to broken-

ness church-based ministry would also have. In other words, there may be more similarities between the types of ministries as opposed to vast differences in approaches. Thus, any preconceived notions may need to be tempered until one has fully examined the ministry in question.

The differences that do exist, however, are likely to be tied to doctrine and related proscriptions surrounding sexual behavior and to some extent identity. Put differently, ministries may share a desire for education, support, training, pastoral care, and so on, but they do so out of a position informed by either a theological understanding that same-sex behavior is a moral good (*gay-affirmative*) or a moral concern (*welcoming but not affirming, ministry to brokenness*).

Previously it was mentioned that ISSI conducted a pastors' forum and a focus group addressing similar issues as this study. It is important to note that many of the themes that came out of the responses from these 14 ministry leaders are also evident in the remarks noted from both of the previous venues. For example, having an open and honest environment where people can discuss their sexual identity concerns without criticism was a request made by the focus group that was answered in the mission of 4 of the 14 ministries. Moreover, 5 of the ministries echoed the need for having a safe place in their advice to other churches. To further emphasize the importance of creating a space for persons who experience same-sex attractions; identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; or who have sexual identity concerns, Yarhouse, Brooke, Pisano, and Tan (2005) reported that nearly half of their sample of same-sex attracted young adults desired open communication and acceptance in terms of support from their faith community.

Training, further education, and supervision or consultation are also themes that have risen out of not only this study, the pastors' forum, and the focus group, but in the pilot study conducted by Yarhouse, Brooke, Pisano, and Tan (2005) as well. It seems as though there is a growing consensus amongst church leaders, lay persons, and individuals who experience same-sex attraction that church bodies in general need to be better informed about the issues surrounding areas of sexual identity and same-sex attraction and the potential conflict with one's religious beliefs and values.

Love, acceptance, and compassion are other common themes that were readily apparent. The individuals in Yarhouse and colleagues' (2005) study were looking for love and acceptance; the people involved in the focus group asked to be accepted and treated with compassion; the pastors in the forum desired to know how to lead their congregants to be compassionate towards the issues of and people affected by homo-

sexuality; finally, the ministry leaders in the current study advocated for loving people where they are as well as demonstrated acceptance, love, and compassion within the missions, visions, and descriptions of their ministries.

CONCLUSION

The Exemplar Project was a study of the approaches of church-based ministries that are considered exemplary – by third-party persons solicited through religiously-identified listserves and postings on web sites – in their outreach or ministry to persons who experience same-sex attraction or who struggle with sexual identity concerns. We report in this paper the data gathered from 14 ministries whose representatives completed an on-line survey that asked specific questions about their ministry vision, goals, demographics, and leadership structure. What we found was that many churches that are considered exemplary in their ministry to sexual minorities shared much in common. They were usually under-resourced and somewhat invisible within their own communities. They shared a common burden to provide care to "the least of these" even when significant differences existed in terms of theological doctrine. But the pastoral applications and desire to "come alongside" those who are sorting out sexual identity conflicts was perhaps most fundamental in these ministry exemplars, and we hope that this initial study is the beginning of a broader discussion about how churches can facilitate meaningful engagement, support, and ministry to those who are often battered and bruised – often by the very churches that could provide ministry.

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