

*In response to anti-gay bigotry openly expressed among members of her church, Mary Lou Lemon wrote the following letter to her pastor in February 25, 1996.*

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Perryton, TX  
February 25, 1996

Dear Roy,

I am writing you hoping that you and I can have some conversation that will lead us, as a church, into some serious study about the issue of gay/lesbian people. My prayer is that we learn the truth about these children of God who happen to be gay/lesbian, bi-sexual or trans-sexual. Our integrity will not let us isolate these family members any longer. They are human beings who do not choose to be different from the majority of us.

In the last ten to twelve years I have had to look at my own prejudices about anti-semitism, chauvinism, homophobia and racism. To be honest it hasn't been easy but I have learned that people like myself can change once truth is learned and we no longer have to live in fear of some unknown barbarious "evil".

How do we learn the truth about gay/lesbian people? Obviously, the only way to learn is to talk to those people themselves, read their life stories, listen to their families, hear speakers and attend conferences which have the purpose of seeking truth – not the purpose of indoctrinating or persuading.

My reading, listening, talking, and studying has caused me to put names and faces together; faces of families in our church, families in our community, families who have suffered the devastating, deadly ostracism of prejudice and hate that people perpetrate – perhaps unknowingly and through ignorance but still having the effect of excruciating suffering by the recipients.

Conservative statistics show that well over one third of the suicides committed by young people were those who knew themselves to be gay/lesbian and had lived in unmitigated "hell", if you will, trying all manners of things to change and be like everyone else – accepted, loved etc.

Think back in your own experiences. Remember the boy or girl who just didn't fit? Remember the ugly remarks? Remember the look of the last one to be chosen as you chose up sides for a game? Remember the big smile of the one trying to please, the over-eagerness to be helpful, to be one of the gang? What was your first experience with knowing what "queer" meant?

Think back to friends who said about their child, "Bret is not like his brother, he would rather read or play the piano etc." or that "Bev is a tom boy and is only interested in sports rather than parties and pink dresses etc."

We can quote scripture, but we have to honestly admit that we only select the scriptures we can rationalize and that do not point to us or condemn us. We espouse and take

literally scripture that point to others but we definitely do not take literally such scriptures that say things like “sell everything you own etc.” or “love your neighbor as yourself.”

And the lesbian/gay is our neighbor. They are in everyone’s family somewhere, they are in every work place somewhere, they are in every congregation somewhere. They are born, precious babies in heterosexual homes, they have brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents etc.

They are God’s children. He created them with great and beautiful gifts.

They want just what you and I want – homes, family, jobs, loving relationships, legal loving relationships, affirmation. Most of the gay/lesbians I know personally are Christian and profess love for God. Most often, He is the only one they can turn to, their church, pastor, school, family, friends having said or implied to them “you are disgusting, you are sinful, you are NOTHING and you should not be allowed to even exist!”

Have you ever considered the self-disgust, anguish and torment of a young person who has to finally recognize and come to terms with his/her “difference”? Have you not read or heard of the desperate prayers prayed over and over in the darkest hours of the night for God to change them, to take it away?

When one of our most devout church members tells me her son would not be welcome in our church when I ask if he would come to church, then we need to start thinking and moving.

The church is wrong in our condemnation! We must rethink what we are doing and to do this, we must have the leadership of stable, open-minded people who are informed, intelligent and, yes, loving.

This church can no longer fail to be the church to these many families. We cannot keep riding along on our “feel good religion” and ignore these precious human beings. If we do, we, who call ourselves the church, will never be God’s church.

You and I have never seemed to find or make time to talk. I would appreciate getting to visit with you, getting to share information and have dialogue together.

Respectfully, prayerfully and with hope,

Mary Lou Lemon

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**For more about Mary Lou Lemon and the film, Inlaws & Outlaws, visit:**

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