

New Beginnings Ministry:

one step in the right direction

An opinion

essay

by

John Valk

I had an opportunity to speak with Pat Allan last month as she stopped in Fredericton enroute to Halifax.

Ms. Allan is director of "New Beginnings Ministry", an outreach to gays and lesbians. Allan's life has undergone dramatic change. As she puts it, she was "once trapped in homosexuality". Her decision to leave behind her gay "lifestyle" came when she realized her profound unhappiness with it. Change was made possible, she says, through much counseling and tremendous support from friends. Healing in her life came also by a conversion to the Christian faith, something which she feels is crucial to any real healing.

From her own experience, Allan is well aware that homosexuality is "rarely a free and clear choice, and is usually acted upon due to a lack of options and choices." Furthermore, she believes most gays and lesbians are basically unhappy and/or confused about their orientation and lifestyle. Statistics on substance and alcohol abuse and suicide rates among the gay and lesbian community appear to bear this out. Indeed, many of them will affirm that their state of happiness is directly proportional to the degree to which they "come out of the closet" and accept their homosexuality.

Due both to her past and present way of life, Allan is quite sensitive to the increasing phenomena of "gay-bashing", something which she finds quite unacceptable. Homosexuals, as persons, have the same basic rights and freedoms as heterosexuals, and discrimination against the person cannot be justified. According to her, this is a message that many in our society, as well as in the Church, need to hear, for heterosexual self-righteousness is as arrogant and presumptuous as it is insensitive.

Allan acknowledges that a multiplicity of factors contribute to the gay and lesbian orientation or predisposition, but a biological factor, she asserts, has yet to be proven. Here she is in company with others who stress that there is no hormonal or genetic predisposition to homosexuality. For the most part, Allan's views are based on those of Dr. Elizabeth Moberly, a psy-

chologist. From her research, Moberly has uncovered what she feels to be the one constant underlying factor among all gays and lesbians: some deficiency in the relationship with the parent of the same sex and a drive to make good this deficit by means of same sex relationships.

Many charge that these findings are both inconclusive and biased, for there are studies which have come to quite different conclusions. For Allan, however, they have been very helpful, as she struggled to find healing in her own life. Many with whom Allan has come into contact in her ministry have also found healing through therapy and counselling based on Moberly's theory.

In her counselling in New Beginnings Ministry, Allan does not insist that the gay or lesbian refrain from association with those of the same sex. If Moberly's findings have any merit, she insists, relations with the same sex need very much to be developed in order for healing to take place. New Beginnings Ministry also does not seek to "convert" gays to heterosexuality. Although such a "conversion" does sometimes occur, in most cases it is not a possibility. By means of counselling Allan does seek, however, to change the gay or lesbian by encouraging him or her to abstain from the homosexual lifestyle. Critics argue, though, that changes of this sort are often only temporary.

Allan draws a careful distinction between homosexual acts and the gay or lesbian orientation, that is, the attraction or disposition towards same sex rather than opposite sex relationships. Making such a distinction, she feels, is crucial, for it is important to distinguish between the person and the act: between an issue of equality and justice, and what she perceives to be an issue of morality. Failure to do so will lead to much confusion. One wonders if that is not the case in the United Church's attempt to ordain "homosexuals" to the Christian ministry. The issue, it would appear, is not really the ordination of gays or lesbians. The Christian Church has been ordaining gays for almost 2000 years. The controversy, it would seem, has rather to do with the extent to which people will permit sexually active gays or lesbians to hold certain positions in society. Many will argue that when one aspires to a position (e.g. clergy, teacher) which in a heightened way is a role model for others, especially the young, certain behavioral restrictions need to be made, be that homosexual or heterosexual.

In making the distinction between orientation and act, Allan maintains, as do many Biblical scholars, that the Bible is relatively silent on the gay or lesbian orientation. It is not silent, however, on homo-

sexual acts, and Allan has come to understand and believe that "homosexual acts are sin". According to her, the Bible refers to homosexuality always in verb form: "God condemns the act, but not the person for his or her temptation, orientation or vulnerability."

There are some theologians, however, who are inclined to characterize these acts as wrong rather than as sin, especially when they understand "sin" generally in the context of deliberate acts of free will. Some believe that homosexual acts, as well as orientation, are also seldom freely chosen, but result largely out of compulsion. That is, homosexuals cannot not do what they do.

Allan agrees with most Biblical scholars in saying that the Scriptures speak very clearly against certain sexual activity: licentious, immoral and lustful. These passages, as apropos today as they were when first written, apply equally to homosexuals and heterosexuals. Disagreement comes in regard to certain texts which appear to be directed specifically against homosexual activity, regardless of the gay or lesbian's particular

situation. Some theologians disagree on the manner in which these texts can and ought to be applied today.

Allan, however, believes that the Scriptures do speak specifically against all homosexual activity, and in all situations. As such, in her ministry she encourages celibacy, as difficult as this may be, and stresses the need for much power of the will, divine assistance, or a combination of the two, for this tough journey. Yet, she does not regard the celibate as asexual. Humans were created as sexual beings, and it is virtually impossible to deny our sexuality. She does insist, however, that it is possible to come to terms with our eros, or erotic notions. The absolute need for genital sexual expression is not a given, though she says that many in our society operate on that assumption. Non-genital, non-erotic forms of expression, according to Allan, may even serve to be more meaningful for relationship building, especially for those who, for one reason or another, are and remain single, whether they be homosexual or heterosexual.

Having taken this position, Allan would affirm, however,

as do many others, that to merely state that all homosexual practice is a sin would remain a very incomplete moral witness to the issue of homosexuality. The onus on those who are deeply empathetic to the struggles of the homosexual brother or sister is to listen and understand, rather than shout triumphant judgments from the rooftops. After all, it was Jesus himself who spoke to the "Pharisee" in all of us: "Let him (her) who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone." (John 8:7). Nonetheless, Allan would not want to ignore Jesus' parting statement to the woman caught in adultery: "Go and sin no more." She believes this applies equally well to gays and lesbians.

Regardless of where one may stand on this very complex and sensitive issue, the challenge before all of us is to seek to live sincere lives that bring us and others meaning and wholeness. We are all incomplete beings in search of more complete selves. New Beginnings Ministry has presented gays and lesbians with one means that may lead to healing and a more meaningful life.

Mexico 1990

The Experiment in International Living

Press Release

This year's departure for the experiment in International Living - Community Service and Homestay in Mexico, is on July 23 and the return is on August 28.

The cost of the trip is \$14,000 to \$16,000 for the five weeks including round trip from Fredericton.

Four days are spent in Mexico city; two weeks with Mexican families in Corboda, Vera Cruz; and two and a half weeks in a Mexican village in the state of Toluca doing community service.

HOW TO APPLY:

1. Complete the application form and include 4 photos, your deposit (\$100), a "Dear Family" letter to your hosts, in the language of the host country, two references and a medical examination. In the case of applicants under the age of 21, a language teacher's reference is also requested as well as a parent's or guardian's authorization for emergency medical treatment.

2. Cancellation Fees. No refund will be made if cancellation is made less than 35 days prior to departure.

3. Insurance. Health and accident insurance during your stay in the host country is

included in your fee.

4. Thank You to Host Family. It is the responsibility of the participants to write a thank-you note to his/her host family within a week following the homestay. A thoughtfully selected Canadian gift to the host family as a token of friendship and a memento of your visit is an Experiment tradition which we hope you will uphold.

5. Travel Arrangements (for individual homestay only). The applicant is responsible for the cost of all transportation and travel to and from destination. All applicants are responsible for notifying host families of the date, time and method of arrival.

For more information contact:

Marion Cumming 472-2915 (mornings preferred)
Nela Rio 452-7700 ext. 443, Office EX 325 - St. Thomas University
Sandi Moore 472-2634 (evenings).

The Experiment in International Living endorses the following educational assumptions as fundamental to the accomplishment of its stated mission:

1. Having an intercultural experience enhances opportunities for learning, self-awareness and global education.

2. In a world of increasing

interdependence it is essential that as many qualified individuals as possible be given a carefully planned intercultural experience.

3. The purpose of such an experience is to develop an awareness that cultural differences should be sources of personal enrichment rather than causes of conflict.

4. The most effective intercultural experience is a homestay or other experience in which the individual participant is as fully immersed as possible in the host cultural environment.

5. As an organization offering a wide variety of intercultural programs, the Experiment seeks to ensure that its participants are carefully selected and well-prepared, and are offered competent support during programs as well as an opportunity to effectively evaluate the experience. To the greatest extent possible, this should also apply to those involved as hosts in the receiving country.

6. Experiment programs should be designed to take advantage of the participants' differences in age, motivation, cultural background, relevant past experience, and time available for the intercultural experience.

7. The participant must make every possible effort to adjust to the customs and habits of the host culture.