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# Open Hands

Vol. 14 No. 1  
Summer 1998

Resources for Ministries Affirming  
the Diversity of Human Sexuality

## BISEXUALITY

### Both/And Rather Than Either/Or

What Might Jesus Think?  
Test Your "Bi-Q"  
Personal Stories  
How Little Gender and Orientation Tell Us

*Open Hands* is a resource for congregations and individuals seeking to be in ministry with lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons. Each issue focuses on a specific area of concern within the church.

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
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**Call for Articles for Open Hands Spring 1999**

**First We Listen! Voices Around the Globe**

**Theme section:** We want to hear firsthand from l/g/b/t people around the world, listening to different understandings of both sexuality and spirituality and their interrelationship in people's lives. Do you know someone we may approach for an article? We are also interested in articles from those with experience or expertise in a culture or cultures other than the dominant majority culture of the United States and Canada.

**Ministries section:** We are seeking columns describing practical experience and suggestions in the following areas: Welcoming Process, Connections (with other justice issues), Worship, Outreach, Leadership, Youth, Campus, Children. These brief articles may or may not have to do with the theme.

Contact with idea by November 1

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## A Bisexual Couple's Story

John and Mary

It's been over twenty years since we met one spring weekend. We are a man and a woman who happen to be bisexual and who have been together over two decades. In that time, monogamy has never been a dimension of our relationship. Indeed, the weekend we met and became lovers, we compared stories of our past sexuality and each found in the other an amazingly kindred spirit.

The mid '70s were the height of the counterculture. We were both peace activists, and that weekend we were visiting a collective household of other activists. We were all seeking to live a simple lifestyle apart from the war-making U.S. government and profit-driven multinational corporations. Feminism was an even stronger point in our ideology (and remains so). Many of us felt that capitalism, racism, sexism and all of the other trappings of traditional U.S. society had to go—including traditional marriage.

Both of us had been recently divorced, following tumultuous "open marriages." Despite the disastrous endings to our earlier attempts at open relationships, both of us were convinced that sexual possessiveness was among the ills of which society needed to be cured.

At the time, I was an explicitly non-Christian attender of Friends meetings. Mary attended meeting as well, but described herself as a "feminist Christian," a term I told her was an oxymoron on the same level as "military intelligence." Despite the teasing, it was clear to each of us that we were called to our countercultural stand, called to be prophetic voices for social change and justice.

Soon our relationship expanded to embrace another equally-minded young man. The three of us shared our activism, our income, and our bed. We bought a home together, and lived together happily for over five years. About the time he left, we got involved with another woman who was our partner

for another five years. After she moved on, more and more people were seeing us as a couple, and soon we announced our partnership in a ceremony we wrote ourselves.

Several ordained ministers officiated. The word marriage was never mentioned, and the ceremony included no marriage license, no vows of sexual fidelity, and no exchange of rings. It was, in short, a commitment service, not a wedding. Because we are of the opposite sex no one raised any question. This

heterosexual privilege is something about which we continue to feel some guilt. It is very easy for us to pass as straight. Yet in our private lives we are living out a sexual identity that would not be easily understood or accepted. Often we have chosen

not to reveal it. In some respects this article is a coming out to those of our friends who recognize us in it. Church friends, we are not as straight as we may appear!

A couple of times each month we attend parties where like-minded couples meet. Many couples in our group have been married for twenty years or more, and some have been lovers for many decades. These "alternate lifestyle" clubs have few rules, but one is cardinal—"no" means *no*. All sex is consensual, mutual, and responsible—meeting, we believe, all the criteria for ethical sexual behavior discussed in the last issue of *Open Hands*. We only party with friends we meet through the lifestyle, and would never dream of recruiting either our straight or gay friends to this.

Interestingly enough, though female bisexuality is widely accepted in the lifestyle, male homophobia is rampant. A few have been actively working against this homophobia, and we both now help lead a workshop on "bisensuality" each year at a national lifestyle convention of 500 people. Gradually we are breaking down the stereotypes, and

men are learning to be sensual with one another.

In all this we are out as Christians. Most Sunday mornings we are in church. We have supported one another in our ministries and spiritual development even as we have explored our sexuality separately and together. As our sexual life has grown, so has our spiritual life.

When my congregation began studying the issue of homosexuality, we began to openly claim "bisexual" as an identity for this checkered sexual life we share. People are quick to say "being bi doesn't mean you're promiscuous." And indeed, many bisexual people are faithful to one person while acknowledging the potential of attraction to others. But others are nonmonogamous and feel that to be otherwise would be to deny an important part of ourselves.

It seems to me that many people are willing to accept those who are not straight so long as their relationships mimic those of heterosexual couples. Yet we believe that to identify oneself as bisexual is to accept ambiguity in life, a blurring of gender roles socially and in intimate relationships. In our view, bisexuality opens up the possibility of choice not just of a sexual partner but of a style of relationship.

Recently a local pastor offered a brief meditation on the resurrected Jesus appearing to his disciples as they fished and advising them where to cast their nets, a story found in John 21. She noted that verse 11 says the net held 153 fish—that is, every species of fish known to humanity at the time. And the net held them all. The church is a net, she concluded, and it too can hold every kind of fish without tearing.

Mary and I are pretty strange fish, but we believe God made us that way, and we join God in saying, "It is good!" ▼

*John and Mary (pseudonyms) live in a southeastern city and are active in two different welcoming congregations. Mary sings in the choir. John regularly leads Bible study. Mary is on the staff of another welcoming congregation as well. You can reach them at [redacted]@juno.com*

