

Stories

After reading each of the following, ask yourself:

- How do I feel about this situation?
- What pastoral issues are raised here?
- What would be my response?

Stephen

Stephen came to faith in his early forties through the influence of a colleague at his work. During his baptismal classes he told his pastor that he was gay. Initially he found the pastor very supportive. It was made clear to him that he must from now on lead a celibate lifestyle. Stephen was happy to go along with this. He felt accepted by God and the significant people in the church he had told about his sexual orientation... At the church meeting at which his application for membership was discussed there was a long and heated debate.. Many church members struggled with the idea of admitting a gay man to membership, but were reassured by his intention to remain celibate from now on. So Stephen became a church member.

He was encouraged to give up seeing his gay friends, whom he tended to meet on the gay scene at bars and clubs. The pastor thought they would be a bad influence, and that Stephen would soon be led back into being sexually active again. Stephen felt not trusted. He wanted to carry on seeing the friends he'd known for years, and most especially he wanted to share his newfound faith with them... His desire to witness to his gay friends became a source of tension between himself and other members of the church

Mavis (50) and Tony (51)

A minister new to the church visited Mavis and Tony in their own for the first time. They shared with him that they had been married for 26 years and had 3 young adult children now living independently. They been good friends before they became a couple. Despite a long and in many ways successful marriage they had experienced a lot of difficulty with sexual relationship which was now non-existent. Tony explained that he felt strongly attracted to men and though he loved Mavis greatly he regarded her as his best friend rather than a lover. As a teenager, Tony had struggled with his sense of attraction to men. He had asked for help and been told by several experienced older Christians that this was just a phase and that the best thing for him would be to get married. However, marriage had made no difference to his feelings towards men though he had always been faithful to his wife. On her suggestion, a few years ago, they had been to see a psychosexual therapist for help with Tony's lack of sexual desire for Mavis. Having some sexual counselling had helped them both to understand Tony's sexual orientation and to find a way of maintaining their marriage without a sexual component. Both felt they should be open with their new minister. They

had not felt able to tell their previous minister. Tony revealed that he had just been asked to stand as a deacon in the forthcoming election.

Diane (34)

Diane was the youngest child in her family, having 4 older brothers. As a teenager she had never been able to get enthused by the 'boytalk' school friends found so important. In her late teens she'd had one or two short relationships with men but had never found herself really in love or feeling sexual desire.. Diane trained as a nurse and became a Christian during her training. After some years' experience she became aware of a sense of call to serve overseas. A couple at her church were very supportive and she grew close to both partners. Mark, the husband, worked away from home so Diane spent more time with Lisa, the wife. Once when Mark was away Lisa told Diane that she was really unhappy about the sexual part of the marriage. She broke down in sobs. Diane tried to comfort her but she too was feeling very vulnerable as she had slowly become aware that of her own strong feelings for Lisa. The two women moved on to have a sexual relationship with each other. This blew Diane's mind, as she felt very confused about her own sexual identity and guilty not only about becoming sexually active with another woman but also because her partner was a married woman. Eventually she sought counselling. In the first instance this helped her to stand back from what had happened between herself and Lisa and secondly to begin to deal with her feelings about her relationship with both Mark and Lisa. Coming to terms with her sexual orientation as a lesbian woman was a long journey for Diane as she struggled to overcome all the prejudices she had absorbed over the years about homosexuality. Then there were decisions to make as to whether she should seek a relationship, and implications to consider about her missionary call.

Adrian

Adrian has been the minister of a Baptist church for the past nine months. When searching for a new minister, the diaconate had been impressed by Adrian's profile but one or two of them had commented on the fact that at the age of 35 he was still single. He was questioned about being single in his interview. Adrian responded thoughtfully to questions about where he would draw his support from, indicating that he had a wide range of friends, was well-organised and able to look after himself. On his arrival at the church, Adrian moved into the spacious manse, commenting that he would rattle around in it on his own! After about four months he informed the deacons that he now had a friend, Greg, lodging with him. There was plenty of space for Greg, and of course his contribution would help pay the bills. Greg did not attend church but was always friendly helpful if he happened to answer the phone at the manse or there for meetings. Some people started to get the impression that Greg was more than just a lodger, and shared their concerns with the church secretary. Discussing holidays, Adrian told the church secretary that he and Greg were going to Greece for a fortnight. The secretary was feeling increasingly uncomfortable. He asked Adrian whether

Greg had plans to move on soon or whether he would be staying in the manse indefinitely. Adrian seemed very surprised at the question, and was very much taken aback when the secretary revealed that people were talking about his relationship with Greg.

Tina

Tina recently attended an Alpha course run by her local Baptist church. She received an invitation to the course at the parent and toddler group to which she brought her son Jake. The toddler group leaders had assumed she was a single parent and were pleased to welcome her and 18 month old Jake. When asked how she would manage for babysitters during Alpha sessions, Tina said there was no need to worry as her partner would babysit. Several sessions into the course Tina shared with the group that she was gay and living with her partner Suzie. She had become pregnant with Jake after IVF treatment. Tina and Suzie both regarded themselves as Jake's parents; Suzie supported the family financially whilst Tina stayed at home to look after Jake. Towards the end of then Alpha course, Tina seemed close to making a commitment. The minister felt it was time to visit her at home and arranged to go one evening when Suzie would also be at home. Both women were very welcoming. Tina asked him if he would dedicate their son. Now that she wanted to give her life to God, she had talked to Suzie. They had decided to take a further step of commitment and were planning to have a civil partnership at the local registry office in the near future. After that they would both also like a service of blessing on their relationship. Did the Baptist church do that?

Peter

Seventeen year old Peter had grown up through the Sunday School at his local Baptist church and was now a member of the youth group. He attended church fairly regularly though his family came only occasionally. Close friendships had formed in the group of which Peter was a member. Some of the young people had found boy or girlfriends. At a summer barbecue for the youth group one of the girls, Sharon, hung around Peter and made it clear she liked him. Peter looked increasingly uncomfortable and the minister noticed. Later, when people were clearing up, Peter asked if he could have a word with him. Peter revealed that from the age of six or seven he had realised that there was something different about himself compared to other boys he knew. Though he enjoyed the company of girls and liked having them as friends, he had always felt drawn to boys. By his early teens Peter had come to the conclusion that he was most probably gay. He felt very anxious and confused. So far he had confided in no one. At home his mother was always asking him when he was going to get a girlfriend. At school he heard a lot of 'anti-gay' remarks and jokes, and at church he'd somehow got the impression that homosexuality was a sin. He had reached the point where he had to talk to someone. That evening dealing with Sharon's attention had been very difficult for him – he didn't want to hurt her feelings but was in no way attracted to her. Peter asked whether God would accept him if he came out

as a homosexual person. For some time now he had thought about being baptised but was scared to ask in case the answer was 'no' .