

Faithful Expressions of Singleness and the Divorced Minister

by
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Abstract

This thesis explores faithful expressions of singleness for divorced United Church clergy as defined by those clergy members, and how these expressions are perceived by the church. Using the qualitative research method of narrative inquiry, Rachel Anne Campbell interviews seven United Church Ministers, from eastern, western, and central Canada, to delve into experiences and perceptions of building intimate relationships after divorce among a research cohort of divorced ministers within The United Church community. Through literature reviews, data analysis, and the information given by participants, this thesis reveals how The United Church of Canada has responded in the past and how it might better respond to its divorced single clergy in the future. A key component of this thesis focuses on lifting up and revising past United Church expressions of sexuality to aid in better understanding a more modern sense of sexuality and faithful expressions of singleness.

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Certificate of Ethical Acceptability for Research Involving Humans

This is to certify that the Research Ethics Board has examined the research proposal:

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and concludes that in all respects the proposed project meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and is in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) and Atlantic School of Theology's relevant policies.

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Introduction

Divorce, Sexuality and the Single Minister

At the time I began writing this thesis I was a single divorced female, not dating, and a candidate for ordained ministry in The United Church of Canada. Since then I have been ordained, began full time ministry. I am still divorced and single, but dating in an exclusive relationship. As this relationship began to develop I found myself more mindful of the journey I was on as I live out my research in the real world and experience some of the things my participants have shared as their lived experience.

I have discovered the findings to be both challenging and beneficial. My own personal views of sexuality, faithful expressions of intimacy, and how these relate to my faith and relationship with God have been tested. At times it has been unsettling; at times it has been energizing and a source of blessings. I grew up with certain views of relationships and intimacy, some through the examples of my parents and other people in my community, some in my experiences of dating. All formed a set of expectations. Then I got married, and over the course of that marriage my expectations were shattered. Things were not as I expected. I had not expected to be single again.

Even as a single, divorced person entering ministry, my narrative and those of my participants differ. In my covenanting relationship with my Pastoral Charge, I am seen as a single minister who is dating in an exclusive relationship. Some of my participants

came into ministry divorced and not in a relationship, while others went through divorce within their ministries. However, all experienced what it was like to build intimate relationships while being single, divorced, and clergy.

In some ways I couldn't fully identify with all their experiences. However, I felt their stories and this research would help people in my situation, entering ministry as a divorced single clergyperson, in addition to clergy facing marital breakup while serving a Pastoral Charge, and congregation members who have clergy going through divorce. As Philosopher Susan J. Brison contends, "Feminist theorists are increasingly looking to first-person accounts to gain imaginative access to others' experience. Such access can facilitate empathy with others, which is valued by many feminist theorists as a method of moral understanding needed to complement more detached analytical reasoning."¹ I found the respondents' first person accounts both instructive and enlightening. My original perspective of my personal life, that it was completely private, began to shift. My initial perception, that talking about sexuality in this modern world would be easier, was challenged. I began to see that my intimate life was more complicated in the very public role of a clergyperson. Yet I continued to understand my sexuality as an integral part of who I am.

For me, sexual intimacy and the building of such relationships is about a deeper bond and it is informed by my own personal code of ethics. Divorce does not mean my sexual life is over; I still feel the need to be connected to another person on a deeper level and in an intimate way. I do not want to consider a life without intimate relationships. I

¹ Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton University Press, 2002), 25.

want to hold onto the hope that one day I will find a person with whom I would want to share a caring, compassionate life—and yes, sex. At the same time, I want my sexuality to manifest itself in a way that is consistent with my faith and my church.

The expression of sexuality for divorced single people, in the context of the church, raises challenging questions. How does being divorced and single affect one's sex life? How does faith and ministerial vocation relate to that? When that person is a clergy person, do things become even more complicated? What is it like for single divorced clergy who are trying to meet their own physical and emotional needs while living within the tenets of their faith? These are just some of the questions I explore.

As a recently ordained divorced woman in pastoral ministry with The United Church of Canada, this research interests me because—in many ways—it is about me. Who I am as a sexual being is represented in myriad ways: how I dress, how I speak, what interests me, and so many other factors. My sexual expression is as much a part of me as the freckles on my nose, the food I eat, and my faith.

The argument of this thesis is that The United Church of Canada needs to continue the discussion around sexuality by opening the dialogue on faithful expression of sexuality. This is needed especially for clergy who have been through a divorce and now are creating new intimate relationships. For clergy, life after divorce differs significantly from that of a life-long single persons given the level of scrutiny of their intimate relationships. Going through the failure of a relationship makes those involved and those who witness it very uncomfortable and may shutdown communication. This shutdown in communication then leaves single divorced clergy in a place where they are trying to maneuver on their own.

It is not easy to be single, divorced, and in ministry. There are many factors that are sometimes overlooked, including loneliness, how one's faith is represented in singleness, what dating looks like, how being divorced and single as a clergy is viewed by others, and the list goes on. All this is informed by a sense within divorced people that they have somehow failed in marriage. That self-identified failure breeds caution and a fear of trust, not just of the other person in an intimate relationship, but of one's own judgement as well.

There is public curiosity around the intimate relationships of divorced single clergy. This curiosity is not as elevated for married clergy because it is assumed that as a married person the nature of sexual intimacy is a given. The possibility that a married clergyperson and his or her partner might be involved in polyamory (an open marriage), for example, may not even be a consideration for most congregants. The potential of a more exciting and less defined intimate life for single divorced clergy might pique the imagination of congregants, however, because clergy are under the watchful eye of their congregations. Though different for each person and each congregation, similar themes arise.

For divorced single clergy within The United Church of Canada, expressing one's sexuality may create an atmosphere of negative judgments within the church. Conversely, I argue in this thesis that it can also create healthy understanding among congregants. In both cases this is because while historically congregants may have viewed clergy as two dimensional characters, they are confronted with people much like themselves: vulnerable and subject to the same joy and pain that they feel.

So I began to ask myself, “How do I have a ‘faith-filled’ sex life without negatively affecting my relationship with God, with the Church, and with my congregation? Where does my personal life end and my vocational life begin or are they so intertwined that lines can’t be drawn?” Throughout this thesis I look at what it means to show a faithful expression of singleness. How does each participant define for him or herself what a faithful expression of singleness looks like?

I initially regarded a faithful expression of singleness to be private and internal, directly related to my faith, my morals, and my upbringing. These felt like private internal thoughts. Once I entered into the ministry, however, it became clear that there was a public element to everything I did. Through this research I became more highly sensitive to the public nature of my life. I began to think carefully about my responses to any relationships that I was engaged in.

A life of ministering to a congregation and providing pastoral care can create moral, ethical, and practical barriers to the formation of personal relationships. Difficult though it might be, there are ways single divorced clergy may express themselves wholly and faithfully in both their personal and professional lives.

In this thesis I delve into all these issues and any other factors that were raised during the research and data analysis portion of this work. I asked people who are living life as a single divorced clergy person what it is really like for them. I knew what it was like for me and felt that if there was a common experience it could be brought out and shared for the benefit of others.

I also discuss how divorced single clergy within The United Church of Canada relate their sexuality to their faith, their claimed identity, and their identified persona as

clergy in active ministry. This is achieved partially through interviews that explore participants' experiences with relationship building, dating, and the meeting of intimacy needs. Other aspects considered within this study include an exploration of what has been written on the topic of sexuality and the ministry, including United Church publications over the years, to see if attitudes and practices have shifted.

Topics and themes from my interviews include gender, disclosure, nondisclosure, faith, ministry, intimacy, human sexuality, sexual expression and how this relates to those who are divorced single clergy, and theologies of sexual expression in The United Church of Canada. My goal is to invite conversation about and deeper exploration into human sexuality, specifically for divorced clergy who are single.

In this thesis I use a qualitative research method called Narrative Inquiry. I find Narrative Inquiry a valuable way of collecting data by gathering stories; the data is coded for themes and the findings may suggest some responses. This data, through the process of Narrative Inquiry, can then be presented effectively for not only research purposes, but can also be translated into effective responses to the findings. Adult educator Sharan B. Merriam elaborates: “Stories, also called ‘narrative’ have become a popular source of data in qualitative research. The key to this type of qualitative research is the use of stories as data, and more specifically, first-person accounts of experience told in story form having a beginning, middle and end.”²

The process of finding participants began with a public notification that I required participants with unique narratives. To recruit participants I sent out a general invitation to different United Churches, Presbyteries, and Conferences across Canada, explaining

² Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research* (Jossey-Bass, 2009), 32.

that I was searching for participants for this study. I also posted a YouTube request from my personal YouTube channel explaining the research topic and request for participants. Those who were interested emailed me directly and then signed consent forms before the interviews took place.

It is important to me that we hear the individual stories in order to explore the themes and issues that emerge. This allows me to see what was revealed through open, axial, and selective coding extracted from the narrative transcripts of my interviews. Philosopher Mark Johnson offers the following analysis of the importance of Narrative Inquiry: “The stories we tell emerge from, and can then refigure, the narrative structure of our own experience. Consequently, the way we understand, express, and communicate our experiences is derived from and dependent on that prior narrative structure of our lives.”³ Inquiry relates to story-telling and opens up exploration that has the potential to change how we view things.

I developed a series of questions that explored the ethics of singleness and the divorced clergy person (see appendix A). Responding to these questions in a 30 to 45 minute interview, each participant revealed how their experiences as single divorced clergy in The United Church of Canada not only affected them, but have transformed their lives. All seven of the interviews were transcribed, and the data from narratives were coded. Participants chose their own pseudonyms: *Jezebel, Esther, Sarah, Mary, Balaam, Jacob, and Stephane*. Participants were offered a forum for confidential

³ Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 163.

conversation that allowed them to think out loud in sharing their thoughts about singleness and diverse expressions of faithful intimacy.

This thesis explores how being divorced and single ('single' in the sense of 'not re-married or currently engaged') affects the minister's quest for intimacy. I examine the differences between how male and female divorced ministers are perceived by congregants and I discuss the theological and the ethical issues that arise. Through the process of a qualitative research study in narrative inquiry I ask: "How can a single divorced clergy person express his or her sexuality and build faithful, intimate relationships in the context of his or her ministerial vocation?"

In chapter one of the thesis, I recognize and explore the complexity of sexuality, how it is represented in Christian teachings of vulnerability, and how vulnerability is affected by the public nature of being a clergyperson. In chapter two, I look at the need to have a safe place to have gritty and open conversations centered on the question of how to live one's sexuality faithfully after brokenness in relationship through divorce. In chapter three, I highlight some of the barriers identified by respondents that can get in the way of creating better understanding in church communities and explain the pressing need for a better theological understanding of faithful expression of intimacy.

This thesis is not about clergypersons who ignore professional and covenanting boundaries to fulfill their own personal needs. All my participants clearly state that they respect their professional boundaries as clergypersons. Instead, this thesis is about those single divorced clergy who are trying to build faithful intimate relationships with people not connected to their covenanting relationship.

To be divorced in today's society is not uncommon. "Since the end of the 1980's, the percentage has fluctuated between 35% and 42%. In 2008, 40.7% of marriages in Canada were projected to end in divorce before the thirtieth wedding anniversary."⁴ With an increasing number of divorces within Canada we cannot think that the realities of divorce do not affect clergy.

As Christians we are called to be in relationship with one another and with God. Every relationship with another human has the potential to become intimate (without necessarily being sexual). Intimacy is a basic human need and can be met in many different ways to foster a person's happiness and spiritual wellness. Psychologist Erik Erikson contends this quest for intimacy is important in human development: "Thus, the young adult, emerging from the search for and the insistence on identity, is eager and willing to fuse his identity with that of others. He is ready for intimacy, that is, the capacity to commit himself to concrete affiliations and partnerships and to develop the ethical strength to abide by such commitment, even though they may call for significant sacrifices and compromises."⁵

In looking at experiences and perceptions of sexuality and intimate relationships, it is my hope that The United Church of Canada and its congregations will be equipped for a more helpful response to their single divorced clergy and therefore better able to show appropriate support. I would like to see the development of a better understanding of the dynamics of faithful singleness. I would like to see more comfort in being able to

⁴ Employment and Social Development Canada. "Family Life – Divorce." <http://well-being.esdc.gc.ca/misme-iowb/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=76> (assessed November 10, 2015).

⁵ Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (Malden: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1950), 263.

talk about this topic. It is also my hope that not only The United Church of Canada and its congregations find this research helpful, but also that those who are living as single divorced clergy gain insight and clarity in order to aid in building faithful, intimate relationships in the context of his or her ministerial vocation.

Chapter 1

Defining and Living Our Sexuality in Ministry

A change in attitude can begin by consciously choosing to create an environment of healthy understanding between the church, congregations, and single divorced clergy. This will create better relationships, better means of communication, and better churches. To begin, I look at the nature of human sexuality. I consider how sexuality has been and is viewed, how it relates to our humanity, and how it is represented in our faith. The categories I present in this first chapter are: how the UCC has viewed divorce historically and how that view has changed; clarifying as much as possible what we mean when we use the term sexuality; how personal ethics resonate within a larger community; being open and vulnerable in our sexuality; how our relationship with God interacts with our sexuality; and life within a faith-filled relationship. While sexuality is complex and vulnerability feels dangerous, both are essential parts of every human and ministers are no different.

Divorce and The United Church of Canada

Relationships can be wonderful to those personally involved and the greater community. They can bring joy and hope. The hope is that those relationships that result in marriage will prosper and this will aid in the betterment of the community. However,

relationships are unpredictable and constantly changing. They can bring hurt, neglect and a brokenness that can separate what once was strong into two very divisive parts. These divisions are not only felt by the two people involved but by all those around them. In its 2005 document, *Marriage: A United Church Understanding*, the authors argue:

“While not a sacrament in our specific understanding, we believe marriage to be profoundly sacramental. Marriage is a means of God’s grace not only for the marital partners but also for their offspring and for the wider community.”⁶ It is clear that a marriage affects more than just two people. A vital and healthy bond leads to health and wellness for the couple and for the community within which they live and work.

However, we also have to recognize the risks that unhealthy relationships bring:

The church has repeatedly emphasized the need for preparation and enrichment for committed life partnerships and has emphasized values within marriage and family relationships that “contribute to the wholeness of persons.” As a church, we believe we are also called to challenge those values that “limit and degrade personal worth.”⁷

The wholeness and wellbeing of all those involved is important, as The United Church’s Song of Faith (2006) expresses: “We sing of God’s good news lived out, a church with purpose: resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize, fierce love in the face of violence, human dignity defended, members of a community held and inspired by God, corrected and comforted.”⁸

⁶ “Marriage: A United Church of Canada Understanding,” The United Church of Canada, assessed September 24, 2014, 9. <http://www.united-church.ca/files/exploring/marriage/understanding.pdf>

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ “A Song of Faith,” The United Church of Canada, 2006, 7.

In his 1975 report to The United Church of Canada twenty-sixth General Council meeting, *The Permanence of Christian Marriage*, theologian David Lochhead looks at the marriage vows and identifies them as a true leap of faith: “The marriage vows are neither the terms of a contract nor the prediction of the future. They are the expression of a commitment of two people to each other in hope and expectation. That marriages fail and that no one can be certain that marital failure does not lie in his or her future is no reason to mitigate this hope and expectation.”⁹ This leaves us looking at divorce from many different angles and demonstrates that it is not a cut and dried topic. Marriage, like any other relationship, can reflect both the good and bad realities of life. The overall well-being of all those involved must be taken into consideration, including not only the relationship of the couple, but how that relationship affects the family and community.

In practice, we are constantly pulled between serving our own needs, the needs of others, and the community as a whole. As such, both people within a relationship must be valued and respected. While divorce is the final result of brokenness within a relationship, we must deal with this kind of division respectfully, reaffirming that being divorced does not define the entirety of a person. We need to be comfortable in being in a place of hurt with another. This is difficult because the hurt of separation and divorce of another makes us also look at our own fear of loss, and rejection. We are not immune to this brokenness in relationships and divorce affects clergy like anyone else. This reality is something that family members must deal with, but also involves the entire congregation in one respect or another. In *This Is Your Church* (1982), a document

⁹ David Lochhead, “The Permanence of Christian Marriage” (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1975), 8.

compiled by Rev. Dr. Steven Chambers states:

According to a paper presented to an ecumenical consultation on marriage in 1981, the United Church considers that it has not taken an “absolutist ethical stance” in regard to divorce and remarriage. It has striven “to set before its people both the responsibilities they face in seeking divorce and remarriage afterwards and the grace available to them so that men and women make their decisions and choose their futures as wisely and as compassionately as possible.”¹⁰

The church has provided some guidance and understanding for those facing brokenness in relationship, and gives us a glimpse of how that could be lived out in the church. But how do we talk about it?

The desire to express our sexuality still exists after a divorce and reaching out to build intimate relationships is important. It is a hot topic, one not easily discussed. Ethicist Mark Jordan states: “I am not foolish enough to try to summarize Christian debates on annulment, separation (without remarriage), and full divorce (with the possibility of remarriage). I can perhaps say that historically most Christian groups, even those who have permitted divorce on certain specific grounds, have been reluctant to dissolve marriages.”¹¹ *Marriage Breakdown, Divorce, Remarriage*, a United Church of Canada document from 1962, states that the marriage union is “God’s Creation” and is

¹⁰ Steven Chambers, *This Is Your Church* (Toronto: The United Church Observer, 1982), 64.

¹¹ Mark Jordan, *The Ethics of Sex* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 129.

intended to be “life-long and complete.”¹² While the intention is still life-long fidelity, Lohead and Chambers contend there is the reality that “life-long” commitment is a hope that may not be realized. In the 2005 document, *Marriage: A United Church of Canada Understanding*, it is acknowledged that marriage will have difficulties that people should try to work through. However, The United Church of Canada recognizes that this might not always be possible due to a variety of reasons. Abuse and neglect may destroy the marriage union: “In such cases, it may be in the best interests of all persons involved (including children and society) that the marriage be dissolved by divorce. Further, the church established the possibility and conditions of remarriage.”¹³

Even with this outlook on divorce, there still seems to be awkwardness when it comes to someone who was married, divorced, and is now single. In their report, *The History of the Discourse on Marriage and Human Sexuality in The United Church of Canada* (2005), Matthew Fillier and Christina Murray contend that the United Church of Canada stays within three parameters when considering at marriage breakdown: creation, redemption, and sin. They argue that “It invests heavily in recognizing the responsibilities and actions of both partners, but champions the ability of God’s creative and redemptive love to overcome the destructive capacity of sin, and lead to new life.”¹⁴

We want things to be simple and clear cut. Ethicist Karen Lebacqz discusses how she feels the church relates to those who have been married and are now single through

¹² “Marriage Breakdown, Divorce, Remarriage: A Christian Understanding,” United Church of Canada, approved by the 20th General Council of The United Church of Canada, 1962.

¹³ “Marriage: A United Church of Canada Understanding,” United Church of Canada, 9.

¹⁴ Matthew Fillier and Christina Murray, *The History of the Discourse on Marriage and Human Sexuality in The United Church of Canada* (Halifax: Atlantic School of Theology), 13.

divorce or widowhood. "Churches clearly expect that those who are single will get married and that those who have been married and are now single through divorce or widowhood will simply disappear into the closet until they marry again."¹⁵ Hiding the fact that you are single again after being married seems to focus more on the comfort of those in the church than on the needs of the divorced single.

Clergy are not protected from the failure of a marriage and the need to build new intimate relationships. Professor of Pastoral Psychology Richard A. Goodling and co-author Cheryl Smith point out that increasingly the church is being confronted by the separation and divorce of clergy couples.

No longer is marital conflict either kept hidden within the clergy couple relationship or taken outside the Church with the minister leaving the parish and perhaps ministry; rather, marital conflict, separation and divorce increasingly are lived out within the Church, a challenge to faith and practice, with critical impact upon the congregation and upon the pastor-parish and minister-judicatory relationships.¹⁶

Because of the open nature of divorce, the congregation sees their clergyperson in a vulnerable state. This can be a challenge to faith and practice when looking at how this affects a congregant's relationship with their clergyperson who is going through such divorce and the many feelings that come with it.

¹⁵ Karen Lebacqz, "Appropriate vulnerability: a sexual ethic for singles" *Christian Century* 104, no. 15 (1987), 435.

¹⁶ Richard A. Goodling and Cheryl Smith, "Clergy Divorce: A survey of issues and emerging ecclesiastical structures," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 37, no. 4 (1983), 291.

In The United Church of Canada a minister who is going through a divorce can find support through the different levels of the church structure, including committees of Ministry Personnel, Human Resources, and Pastoral Relations. The question that remains: has the United Church of Canada done enough to deal with this critical impact? Through the church documents, website, and the different governing levels, information can be accessed about divorce, the United Church of Canada's policies on divorce and remarriage, and counseling supports. One of the challenges seems to be the inconsistent nature of how information is distributed. Such issues are being played out within the church; congregations must understand that their clergy may divorce and that divorced clergy may look at building new intimate relationships.

I was and still am a sexual being before and after my marital union with another. An "intimate relationship" is not confined to the conventional boundaries of a person within a marital bond. This leaves divorced single clergy like myself exploring different faithful expressions of sexuality. We find ourselves living out "a challenge to faith and practice" in a place where we must discover how to build intimate relationships within the social ministerial context of The United Church of Canada. To do so we must begin by looking at how we define sexuality.

Defining Sexuality

God created me as a sexual being. As Christians we believe that we are God's creatures—created by God. With this understanding I accept that my sexual nature is an important part of me and that I am called to explore who I am as a sexual being created

by God. This importance demands that I look at how I represent my sexuality to others and how it defines me.

Sexuality is complicated and possesses many more facets of our identities than we allow ourselves to recognize. Ethicist Margaret Farley says that sexuality is more than just body and gender. “Its meaning in the abstract remains difficult to identify, despite the dictionaries. I take it here to include everything that pertains to the sexual—in the sense of sexual desire and loves, feelings, emotions, activities, relationships. As such, sexuality can have physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, personal, and social dimensions.”¹⁷

To explore the many facets that make up our sexuality we must begin to look closely at ourselves as sexual beings. Sexuality is a highly-charged dimension of our lives and it is complicated. Rev. Scott Alexander agrees: “Our sexuality may feel ambivalent, mysterious, complex, or even dangerous. To eliminate some of the inherent murkiness and uncertainty, many people want clear-cut labels and categories. But the intricate nature of sexuality defies all attempts to eradicate complexity, ambiguity and surprise.”¹⁸ We often have great hope that by trying to set up defined spaces, boundaries, and rules we might successfully hide components of ourselves from the world, including our sexuality. However, I am speaking to those around me as a sexual being even on a subconscious level each and every day. Through body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, and a myriad of other ways, I relay who I am as an erotic being.

¹⁷ Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A framework for Christian sexual ethics* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 159.

¹⁸ Scott W. Alexander, *Together In Faith* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1995), 44.

Sexuality is expressed through each of our senses in relationships with other people. It is difficult—one might say impossible—to hide. David Lochhead says that as humans, we respond sexually in a great variety of ways. We reach out and we accept responsiveness from others. “We touch and need to be touched. We become aware of sensuousness of many smells, tastes and sounds. We are attracted to others in a multiplicity of ways and engage with them in various conversational, courting, and attentive activities. Sexual arousal is only one form of sexual response.”¹⁹ Sexual response happens because of a variety of stimuli and for many reasons. Mark Jordan states, “Sexual acts are notoriously open to use by a variety of motives. This is true both personally and socially.”²⁰ We need to explore the intentions and perceptions of the person within the context of the society in which such sexual acts are being expressed. To look at sexuality through the personal and societal filters allows for a better understanding of how these relationships not only affect personhood, but society itself. In my view, better relationships equal better communities. Just as better conversation will aid in better understanding.

At the best of times, how we relate to one another is multi-dimensional and varied from person to person, from experience to experience. These are not always ‘good’ experiences and the expression of sexuality—being intimate with someone—holds its own dangers. Some of these dangers come from sharing of oneself with another. Ethicist Christine Gudorf contends that “This willingness to be vulnerable often takes the form of

¹⁹ David Lochhead, *In God's image...male and female: a study on human sexuality* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1980), 52.

²⁰ Jordan, *The Ethics of Sex*, 15.

personal disclosure, which can either precede sexual intimacy or be provoked by it.”²¹

Personal disclosure in its own right is the revelation of self and can be an erotic act or part of a series of erotic acts. These erotic acts involve opening up, sharing, and trusting another. We see and feel the vulnerability that we often attempt to hide.

Sex In Public²²

What we tend to ignore in liberal democracy—where sexuality is viewed as what is done in private between consenting adults—is that many aspects of the expression of my sexuality are public. Episcopal Bishop and theologian Thomas Breidenthal critiques the liberal view of vulnerability as chosen by detached individuals and says that it does not correspond to the teachings of the Gospels. He disputes the “common sense” view of liberal democracy that we choose exposure and intimacy, that “We start out disconnected, and whatever connection we have is something we have chosen and made. On this view, sexuality does not so much reveal connection as facilitate it.”²³ He argues that the Christian view understands persons as always connected to God and neighbour. If we were not available to one another at such a level of vulnerability then how would it be possible for humans to be transformed? Transformation means growth, change which is not always comfortable, and accepting the grace of God.

²¹ Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994), 111.

²² Stanley Hauerwas, “Sex in Public: How Adventurous Christians are doing it,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, edited by John Berkman, Michael Cartwright (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2001).

²³ Thomas Breidenthal, “Sanctifying Nearness,” In *Theology and Sexuality*, edited by Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 346.

As Christians, we need to recognize that when we turn away from an aspect of ourselves because that feels risky and vulnerable, this actually takes away our opportunity to be in relationship, which is what we are born into and called to live fully. American theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas draws our attention to this with his clarification that a Christian view of sexuality is viewed more properly as social rather than private: “What we have failed to note is that the claim that sex is a matter of private morality is a political claim dependent on a liberal political ethos. Any attempt to reclaim an authentic Christian ethic of sex must begin by challenging the very assumption that sex is a ‘private’ matter.”²⁴ Hauerwas contends that expressions of sexuality form part of a political ethic and part of the public matter of the Christian community. Christianity has a communal aspect and by not discussing who we are as sexual beings we are actually turning away from a huge aspect of ourselves that connect us all and has the potential to transform us “though not always for the better”.

Creature, Creation, and Sexuality

How we view and connect sexuality and the building of intimate relationships through Christianity and its teachings is important when looking at the transformative nature of grace. As creatures within God’s creation, we struggle, hope, fall, are redeemed, and may be transformed. As Christians, we believe we are sinners, susceptible to egocentrism, but also capable of receiving God’s grace.

This powerful aspect of one’s self comes from feeling desired by another person and by God, as Anglican theologian Rowan D. Williams argues. For Williams, sexuality,

²⁴ Hauerwas, “Sex in Public,” 483-484.

like grace, is transformative through this desire for another and “That other is primarily God. For some the desire of God is modeled and mediated through another human being; for others it seems to come directly.”²⁵ Williams contends that in seeing yourself as wanted, as desired by God, by another person, is significant, but he does not extend this into an idealist view of eros.²⁶ He sees the ambiguity of sex. While sex can be an occasion of grace, it can also mess us up. It can and will be a journey of difficulty as well as joy because there is always a chance that relationships will fail and harm us.

The recognition of sexuality as part of creation’s divine call is powerful in the Christian tradition. I cannot hide my sexuality or take it lightly, because to try and ignore such a powerful force within myself affects all other aspects of my life. However, the sexual practices I engage in can also undermine my sense of self and my well-being. With anything so powerful the care of such a human expression and embodied experience is vital.

Sexuality is part of my relationship with God and by accepting this I accept the freedom to allow God to work through me in this world. Rowan Williams writes: “The self, we could say, has attained integrity: the inner and the outer are no longer in tension; I act what I am, a creature called to freedom, and leave behind those attempts at self-creation which in fact destroy my freedom.”²⁷ I learn to cooperate fully with all aspects of myself in thought and expression, and to learn who I am in relationship with my Creator.

²⁵ Rowan D. Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” in *Theology and Sexuality*, ed. by Eugene R. Rodgers, Jr. (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2002), 309.

²⁶ See, Rita Nakashima Brock’s *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (1988), where she develops an idealist view of eros.

²⁷ Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 12.

A person's sexual expression is one aspect of self-identification. *Gift, Dilemma, and Promise*, a United Church Report, states:

To be human is to be sexual. This is because sexuality, unlike many other aspects of life, is not an optional extra, something to be taken or left according to a whim of the moment. Rather, like the colour of our eyes, it is a given, an integral part of our being and of what it means to be human. Human beings are not disembodied spirit-selves who happen to have bodies. We are, essentially, body-selves, we encounter the world around through some or all our senses—through sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch. Our sexuality, then, is grounded in the broader experience of sensuality.²⁸

It is important that my entire being is recognized as an integral whole and not individual parts, even when it can create vulnerability that scares me. That is even more reason to become more comfortable with the topic. My sexuality is embodied in me; it cannot be separated from who I am. Theologian and author Anthony Kosnik shares this view when looking at how sexuality serves us and each other: “Sexuality is not just an isolated biological or physical phenomenon accidental to humans but an integral part of their personal self-expression and their mission of self-communication to others.”²⁹ In this sense my sexuality is “of God.” Like any other aspect of me it cannot be separated from

²⁸ United Church of Canada, *Gift, dilemma, and promise: a report and affirmations on human sexuality* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1984), 10.

²⁹ Anthony Kosnik, “Toward a Theology of Human Sexuality,” in *Sexuality: A Reader*, ed. by Karen Lebacqz and David Sinacore-Guinn (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1999), 548.

my relationship with God, my neighbour and myself. In discussing creation, Rowan Williams says:

But what creation emphatically isn't is any kind of imposition or manipulation: it is not God imposing on us divinely willed roles rather than the ones we "naturally" might have, or defining us out of our own systems into God's. Creation affirms that to be here at all, to be a part of this natural order and to be the sort of thing capable of being named—or having a role—is "of God"; it *is* because God wants it so.³⁰

There is a great sense that something more is going on here: the idea of not being alone, but in an evolving relationship. The United Church shows this. Sexuality is not static, but evolves in our social contexts, developing as we discover our own potential in community, and possibilities of new life in Christ. "As both sexes discover more of their potential to be fully human, new ways will have to be found to describe ourselves and new concepts developed to encompass the new patterns which will emerge."³¹ In order to see the fullness of creation, we need to see humans in their complexity. We need to lift the veil that we put over vulnerability. We have to stop turning our heads because to look at vulnerability in others and in us, scares us.

³⁰ Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 69.

³¹ United Church of Canada, *Gift, dilemma, and promise*, 14.

What Erotic Souls Need³²

Just as my sexuality cannot be detached from my humanity and is part of God's created order, in a Christian view, my sexuality comes with innate vulnerability. We cannot look at what erotic souls need unless we explore the risks of human vulnerability. This exploration can come at a price, according to Karen Lebacqz: "It creates possibilities for great joy but also for great suffering. To desire another, to feel passion, is to be vulnerable, capable of being wounded."³³ She believes that in order for a relationship to be sacred each of the participants need to show equal vulnerability, and she highlights the importance of such an "appropriate vulnerability."

We need to seek and find fitting forms of vulnerability. Theologian Kathleen Skerrett explains this desire in the following terms, "The telos of sexual desire is this mutual kenosis: I want to be poured out incarnate in response to the reciprocal pouring out of the other towards me. Erotic love encounters the other as the embodiment of a being of incommensurable value—a being who moves and constrains me."³⁴ Skerrett contends that sexual desire is very powerful force in our human lives and it has the potential for expressions of reciprocity. We see, feel, and know the personal risks to ourselves of being in relationship with others and still we desire to engage in the building of such relationships. We feel a powerful pull to deeper relationship and connection.

It is important to see that sexuality is an aspect within each of us that expresses our vulnerability. This vulnerability is exposed when we unveil who we are as sexual

³² Kathleen Roberts Skerrett, "Beyond "Consent": David Mamet's *Oleanna* and a Hostile Environment for Souls," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 12 (2011): 235-244.

³³ Lebacqz, "Appropriate vulnerability," 436.

³⁴ Kathleen Roberts Skerrett, "Sex, Law, and Other Reasonable Endeavors," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18, no. 3 (2007), 92.

beings in the act of opening ourselves up to be in some sort of relational experience with another. Lebacqz sees evidence of this within scripture and points out that our fear of such vulnerability does not come from Scripture: “Consider the Song of Songs (the ‘holy of holies’), which displays in glowing detail the immense passion and vulnerability of lovers. This is not married or ‘preceremonial’ sexuality, nor are children the justification for the sexual encounter. It is passion pure and simple. And it is graphic sex. The Stoic fear of passion is not biblical.”³⁵ Song of Songs shows reciprocity between the two lovers, however, not all texts in the Bible about relationships reveal reciprocity of mutual regard.

This offering of one’s self to another goes much deeper than the action itself. It is to be mutual and respectful. We see this self-giving or self-offering within Christian teachings. It is clearly stated in the double love command found in Matthew 22: 37-40: “He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” To offer one’s self in this way is not an easy task and not always a joyous journey but it is what we are called to do as Christians.

Rowan Williams explains that this offering of one’s self must involve being present and exposed: a body of grace is open vulnerability. As active participants we are to learn from each other in order to be transformed and open to receive. “I can only fully discover the body’s grace in taking time, the time needed for a mutual recognition that

³⁵ Lebacqz, "Appropriate vulnerability," 436.

my partner and I are not simply passive instruments to each other.”³⁶ This notion of time is not abstract; it is a full commitment to the here and now within any relationship and it is an important part of who we are to be as Christians in mind, body, and spirit: “We are created so that we may be caught up in this, so that we may grow into the wholehearted love of God by learning that God loves us as God loves God.”³⁷

Thomas Breidenthal contends that we do not live out the teaching of the Gospel when we accept the comfortable fantasy that we control and choose who we are going to be vulnerable with, a fantasy that obscures our need for grace. Breidenthal opposes what he calls *radical individualism*: the idea that I, owner of the self, can gift myself to another, leaving me completely in charge. Instead he argues that as Christians we are called to live into a vulnerability we haven’t chosen, but are born into: our *radical availability*. The very nature of being Christian is to offer ourselves, attentive to the good, bad, and ugly, the risks and pleasures that relationships bring into our lives.

The Gospel calls us to a life of nearness that is of God and it is not of our choosing or under our control. Breidenthal states: “The Bible is no stranger to the theme of the dangerous neighbour. Yet the New Testament, echoing the Hebrew Scriptures, places before us a twofold command: Love God, and love your neighbour as yourself.”³⁸ It is not about walls, rules, and boundaries that we desperately try and put in place and think can protect us, but instead it is about maximizing our nearness to the neighbour. To love the neighbour is to love nearness and that is not safe; it is scary, and yet we do it. As Christians it is about practicing openness to nearness of the neighbour, a difficult, life

³⁶ Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” 315.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 312.

³⁸ Breidenthal, “Sanctifying Nearness,” 350.

long process of learning to love well. In the same way our siblings are not of our choosing, we are still called to be vulnerable, near to them, despite the risks, while open to the possibilities.

This dance between risk and the fulfillment of God's redeeming grace are intricate parts of the transformative nature of Christianity. Breidenthal claims that we need to be aware that the erotic soul is radically available and that this is not always good news because we are sinful. Vulnerability, theologically speaking, means accepting that we are sinners. "As Christians we seek to live lives that honor the connection which all humans beings share, while recognizing that in a fallen world this connection is as likely to facilitate violence as to enable communion."³⁹ Even so, God redeems us in and through relationship with love of God and love of neighbour. We live out our lives rooted in sense of relationship with God and included in this relationship is giving and receiving of grace. That is where radical availability in the Christian view tends to land us in painful spots because we are not only the receiver but the giver of grace that takes us to places of transformation. We need to be available on a holy level of nearness and availability to be a part of God's transforming work. Breidenthal states: "But Jesus cannot get through to me unless (whether I like it or not) I am radically available to him as a fellow human being, and I cannot minister Jesus to others unless every person I engage with is radically available to me (and vice versa)."⁴⁰

As ministers we may be more aware of such a radical availability and realize this is about nearness, a holy nearness that reveals us to the neighbour and the neighbour to

³⁹ Ibid., 352.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 346.

us. We as Christians need to know this, live this, and as sinners we will get it wrong at times. However, Jesus' crucifixion makes no sense without seeing transformation in Christ's incarnation. What radical availability means in this sense is that we are radically available to God and we are not solely responsible. This is not something I can do on my own. It is beyond me and as such involves God. I can't control everything with rules and boundaries and I must accept that a certain *askesis* or discipline is needed in the idea of truly following the Christian teaching of loving the neighbour. If I can't acknowledge radical availability I can't hear the Gospel message and I can't whole heartedly affirm my sexuality. "The Bible witnesses in numerous ways to the dangers posed by our radical availability to one another under the condition of sin, but it also affirms the essential goodness of this availability as part of God's intention for us."⁴¹ Breidenthal shows us the complexity of radical availability as life giving and dangerous. So that it requires life-long disciplines and work to learn how to truly inhabit the risky nature of relationships. Theologian Phyllis Trible's classic book *Texts of Terror* amplifies what Briedenthal refers to as the biblical themes of the "dangerous neighbour" and how our connections with others are "as likely to facilitate violence as to enable communion," giving "the condition of sin".

One such biblical story of extreme danger and violence which Trible explores is that of Tamar, Princess of Judah (2 Samuel). Amnon, her brother, sends a request to have his sister Tamar come aid in his recovery from illness. King David grants the request and sends Tamar to her brother. She believes she's there to prepare food for him and nurse him back to health. Amnon wants and takes more. Although Tamar resists and protests,

⁴¹ Ibid., 351.

Annon rapes his sister. Annon, her brother should be her protector becomes the predator, her needs ignored, and subject to his lust. Tamar's rape by her brother mirrors the sexual violations by many women at the hands of their present or former intimate partners. With her analysis of this story Tribble reveals the possible excruciating aspect of vulnerability, in the actions of Tamar's deceitful brother. "Through a series of orders, all of them obeyed, Annon has manipulated the occasion to feed his lust."⁴² Annon takes advantage of the power he has over Tamar and abuses her and that power.

Imbalance of power destroys reciprocity and it can also lead to a violent death, as we see in Tribble's analysis of Judges 19, the story of the Concubine from Bethlehem. What ought to be a safe place of lodging for her and her Levite husband becomes the site of horrific violence. In order to save himself from being raped, the Levite hands over his own concubine. Forced out onto the street she is brutally rape and beaten as her husband sleeps inside. In the morning her hands reaching across the threshold for help, she finds no protection. Tribble contends that this woman has no power: "Raped, tortured, and dead or alive, this woman is still in the power of her master. Her battered body evokes escalated brutality from him. No agent, human or divine, intervenes. Instead, the knife, symbol of a terror that faith once prevented, now prevails."⁴³ Her mutilated body is subject to further brutality when her husband cuts her up into twelve pieces to be distributed through the territories of Israel. We don't know whether she dies at her husband's hands or as a result of the rape, but she is distributed as property to defile others by the person who had ultimate power over her.

⁴² Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 45.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 80.

Following the story of the Levite's Concubine it is a gross understatement to say there is great risk in being open to another. We risk violation even as there is also the possibility of loving attentiveness from the other. As humans we desire and need to be desired. That is terrifyingly open. Erotic souls need relationship with one another and with God and in order to have that happen we need to live into our radical availability. If we think we are choosing to be vulnerable then we are not living the Gospel.

Breidenthal argues that "One way is to live out our availability to one another in such a way that, encounter by encounter, relationship by relationship, Christ's redemption of the whole body of humanity finds its concrete fulfillment."⁴⁴ Our very relationship with God encompasses great desire and longing that leaves us with love and grace. Like other aspects of our humanity this is not safeguarded in any way from the painful realities that being open to this vulnerability will bring.

A divorced clergy person needs to accept his or her own sexuality, and recognize that with the joy comes responsibility and risk. He or she must be prepared to be vulnerable and available on the most intimate levels. As such, our private lives are no longer as private as we might prefer, but the rewards of fully embracing our sexuality is to accept ourselves as God made us, and celebrate one of the many gifts that God gives to us. It is a gift that will take us through many times of exceptional highs and lows, and one that continues to transform us in incarnational ways.

⁴⁴ Breidenthal, "Sanctifying Nearness," 352.

Chapter 2

Faithful Intimacy: Data Analysis

I detail and analyze the narratives of seven participants located across Canada who were part of this qualitative research study. In their responses to a series of questions (see appendix A), participants look deeply at the public nature of a person's sexuality; how sexuality is connected to God, faith, and intimate relational needs; the dynamics of dating; and personal views of being a divorced minister in the UCC.

In chapter two, I argue that there needs to be more dialogue between all levels of the church concerning faithful expressions of sexuality. I also show that both theological and secular professional language can aid in this continuing conversation in order to live one's sexuality faithfully and in a place of better understanding. We need to talk, because as participants point out, sexuality is connected to their faith, their relationship with God, and one another.

Through references to Scripture, participants connect who they are as sexual beings to the great commandment of love of neighbour and self. What is missing is open conversation that can be used for a theological discussion around divorce, building new intimate relationships, sexuality, and faith. While the United Church of Canada has worked very hard to open the dialogue about sexuality being part of who we are and that divorce can take place, we need to continue to move forward, to share in open

conversations that will aid in creating better understanding. Clergy are people too and participants who have gone through failed relationships need a safe place to be honest about their experiences. Participants articulate the vulnerability of speaking about those failed relationships.

Defining Sexuality

Participants connect their sexual identity and faith as part of who they are as persons; to hide from this reality is foreign to them. We are not self-contained entities who require no personal contact. Instead, as pointed out by Thomas Breidenthal, as Christians, we are called to live into our vulnerability; we are called to accept and attempt to live in a life giving way. When participants were asked about their definition of faithful expressions of singleness, the double love command shows up loud and clear as a calling that is not of our choosing.

Mary: A faithful expression of singleness is to live as fully human as God created me to be, using my gifts and abilities, living to the fullness of my potential, loving God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. And also acknowledging, though, that there are needs within myself for intimacy, for love, for affection, for sexuality, but seeking to have those needs met in ways that are healthy that would not be abusive in any way.

Sexuality includes the building of relationships that expose us not only to the joys of relationships but to the struggles and pain that relationships will bring. Skerrett, Williams, Jordan and others challenge “folk theories” about sex as good and the fantasy of sexuality as tidy and comfortable. People will be elevated and people will be hurt because to be in relationship exposes the vulnerable nature that we may tell ourselves we can hide.

Jacob discusses this further by making it clear that the many facets of sexuality can't begin to be defined without discussing principles for ethical relations.

Jacob: It means to recognize the wider context within which any relationship develops so that assumptions are explored and that way there is a healthier foundation on which any relationship might be based. On the other hand, it is also recognition that I do believe we are created individuals who are made for relationship, and that those relationships come in many sizes, shapes, and forms. And that does not always imply that you are always out for some intimate sexual encounter, but rather you are looking for that relationship in whatever way that feeds you in your need at that time, but are still faithful to the Gospel which is self-giving, mutual, life giving, that sort of thing.

Jacob talks about sexuality in terms of changing and variable “need” but if this “need” is to be expressed faithfully, then in his view it should be “self-giving, mutual, [and] life-giving.” A Christian understanding of sexuality includes principles for ethical relations, some of which are grounded in the Gospels, including the Christian love ethic.

When one of the Pharisees, described as a teacher of the law, asks Jesus, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mt. 22:36-40). For participants, finding our way through the labyrinth of sexuality relates directly to our faith. One respondent makes a touching admission when describing this deep connection to the Christian love ethic:

Balaam: I have always felt that all three forms of love that get described in the biblical tradition: you know; Eros, pathos, and agape, are essential to the life of spirituality and I, like most 20 year old undergraduates, was a bonehead about sexuality and sexual relationships sometimes. I was brought up in a culture that engendered very unhealthy male understandings of sexuality and understandings of women. I think

throughout my adulthood I have sought to have how I live out my sexuality shape my faith in terms of what I understand to be a righteous form of Eros and the terms of the ethics of covenant.

Balaam, in his own transformation, assesses his past sexual experience as over-determined by cultural misogyny. The expressions of the erotic—whatever form that takes—become both respectful and creative. This calls for greater involvement of the entire person and not just a physical release.

However, as Stephane highlights, cultural practices are distinct from his understanding of faithful expressions of sexual relations.

Stephane: Well, I think faith is about genuine relationships and I think how those are lived in a variety of ways needs to be consistent with meeting people in a genuine way. I think the so-called tryst or one night stand might be a cultural reality—I don't know, I just hear about it and it is certainly not something I can identify with, understand, or practice.

Even though Rowan Williams, in “The Body’s Grace,” does not exclude one night sexual experiences from possibly, but not necessarily, expressing the body’s grace, Stephane does not understand these short sexual encounters as consistent with his expression of Christian faith, since for him they fail to create connections that are respectful and genuine.

Sex In Public

We are sexual beings and this does not change just because we are “the” minister. We have a role to play in offering a Christian perspective to the conversation. If we don't, this compromises our ability to counsel our congregants. One respondent felt that talking about sexuality in sermons from the pulpit shows a reconnection of the erotic and the life of a faith community:

Balaam: Well it is interesting because I get teased by some of my colleagues because I actually talk about Eros and sexuality in my sermons more than the average minister. I think that the divorce between the erotic and the life of a faith community has been unhealthy over the years. So I speak about sex and sexuality not usually in the first person singular but I think the congregation sees me as a sexual being.

This openness allows for conversation around some practical issues that might emerge for folks in dealing with their own understanding of sexuality and faith.

Participants felt congregations would benefit from seeing their ministers as fully human and realizing that being a sexual being is an important part of their identity. Some even felt that congregants take their cues from their ministers on how to respond to the topics of sexuality and faith, noting that the clergy person's degree of comfort in discussing these issues drives the nature of the conversation.

Jezebel: I am firmly convinced that the best gift I have in ministry is my authentic self. None of my skills are as important as that. And so I would say by being authentically honest with people about any happiness I was finding in an intimate relationship, or any grief, that I was thereby revealing to them my humanness and opening myself as a role model as to how to live within a faithful community as a complete human being.

When we are completely open and authentic, however, we leave ourselves and our relationships exposed to public view. While some of the participants like Jezebel felt being open was the best approach, others felt that the clergy person has to decide exactly how much she or he wishes to reveal when asked if they ever felt they had to hide who they were as a sexual being from their congregations:

Mary: I haven't been extremely open, like I know some of my colleagues have been extremely open with their congregations about they are really looking for someone, and they have let everyone know who they are dating, I haven't done that mostly because I haven't been dating anyone. I don't talk about it a lot but I don't feel that I am hiding it.

While openness can be good in terms of facilitating conversation it also shows our inevitable vulnerability. This is a fact of life in ministry. So we need a safe place, a platform, in order for these conversations to take place. This could be with other colleagues through support groups and webinars on the topic.

Divorced single clergy also struggle with the ideals and perceptions of what the minister and their ministry is supposed to be. To have a place where you can discuss these issues with other clergy would be helpful since you want to articulate how you appear to your colleagues in ministry. Sometimes these conversations are difficult because of our own expectations of ministry.

Jezebel: I was at that point still new in being “the minister” and you have very high ideals for your own behavior based on what you concluded about other ministers that you watched when growing up in the church. So you have—even though you know you shouldn’t—you have this very elevated expectation of perfection.

Such a perfectionist ideal isn’t just held by congregants, but an internal narrative of a clergy person as well. Just as we learn parenting from our parents, we learn ministry from our ministers. But society changes; parenting techniques evolve from generation to generation and the minister’s role and the expectations on the minister also evolve even as the clergy person tries to stay in right relationship with their Christian teachings.

There is a need for ongoing discernment since there are no cut and dried rules.

Participants contend the majority of congregants saw their clergyperson as a person, who like them, goes through difficulties. Knowing this, most congregants respected their clergy enough to trust if they wanted to share personal details about themselves and any struggles, they would do so on their own terms.

Balaam: One of the things I learned from this is be frank, be upfront, and tell people what you expect of them and if it is a reasonable expectation

they will generally live up to it. One of the things I learned it was really helpful for me to just name to my congregation what my expectations were. The second thing it was important for me to allow myself to be cared for in an appropriate fashion.

This kind of response suggests that “best practices” with congregations may relate to “best practices” with erotic partners and as such some participants chose to talk about sex, sexuality, and faith openly from behind the pulpit or when the topic was brought up, not shying away from it. By showing that ministers are sexual beings, participants articulated a sense of feeling more at home in his or her own sexuality as part of what it means to be fully human.

Having the lived experience of brokenness in relation (through divorce) can be an opportunity for a clergyperson to create more relational bonds within a pastoral setting. Participants indicated that sharing a history of divorce instills empathy, understanding, and compassion for people going through similar situations.

Esther: Quite often in the course of a pastoral conversation I am able to share a little bit about my situation that I think allows them to see that I know what they are experiencing or that I can understand that they are feeling. So it is a shared empathy that way.

Congregants were free to ask direct questions because of the experiences their minister had been through. These were authentic conversations about an important aspect of their lives. There was a comfort level with their clergy in discussing their own relationships and their sexuality.

Jacob: I have spoken with a few women—ironically almost all of them are in their 80’s—and they feel comfortable talking to me about their desire for physical intimacy and wondering why the old geezers out there, wherever they might be, if you pardon the pun are not “up for it.”

However, even though shared empathy offered a place of comfort for these congregants, participants also felt that some congregants see them only as “their minister” and keep them under watchful scrutiny.

In smaller or tightly knit communities ministers can face special challenges. People know what you go through, whether you advertise it or not, and being the minister within that community means it doesn’t take long before every action that you take is measured against an ideal of what your behavior should be.

Jezebel: In a small community you can’t wiggle your finger without everyone knowing what you are doing. You might be able to get away with a couple of dates without anyone finding it out, but really you live your life out in the open perhaps more so as a minister, but I don’t know about that. I think everybody in a small community are living their lives in public. That’s why people choose to live in those communities.

Jacob: You are constantly in a fishbowl and you can rail about it all you like but if you don’t accept the reality you are not going to be long in ministry.

We are more aware than ever that we are social beings that are curious about one another. Many feel that we can escape this realization. However, to be Christian is to be public and open in order to live out the Gospel and this task, as pointed out in chapter one, needs to be part of the mission of our church. That means ministry will leave clergypersons maneuvering through the waters of a fishbowl while under a watchful and curious gaze.

Creature, Creation, and Sexuality

Sexuality and faith are part of our incarnation. Whether we are single or in a relationship, God calls us to engage that part of us both physically and spiritually.

Jacob: I mean there are all kinds of physical scripture passages I could quote, but that’s not what it means in the wider context. As far as I’m concerned, we are created as sexual beings and that includes those who

label themselves as “asexual,” because they still are going to be in a relationship, they still enjoy physical touch even though it may not be sexual touch. However for me as a created being regardless of how that creation came about I’m pretty sure my mum and dad enjoyed it and so that is who I am.

As created individuals we are called to embrace the grace-filled presence of God. Part of Christianity is the incarnation of God in human form, a physical person; it follows that being physical in intimate relationships can create very sacred connections. As discussed in chapter one, Rowan Williams highlights this connection in *On Christian Theology* and affirms to be here at all is to be of God. This is all kept within the perspective of being faithful to living in Christ, which is self-giving, mutual, and life giving. This sense of covenant with God and community is important for participants.

Mary: Biblically it is not good for a person to be alone, and so to be in relationship with one another (and part of that is our sexuality and attraction to others) is part of God’s gift to creation and making us... yeah, attracted to one another.

Jezebel: It would have to do with personal integrity. A desire to express one’s sexuality in a way that’s helpful to one’s self and one’s partners and one’s community. A desire to establish relationships that are life giving not only towards one’s self but towards the other and the community.

Balaam: You know I think we are a covenant people, covenant is an essential part of faith and all covenants happen within the context of community and within the context of community relationship with God. So I think even when you are single, whether you have a form of singleness which is celibate or chaste, therefore giving you time for other kinds of relationships, or whether you are dating, or whether you are in non-covenanting partnerships you still try to live according to the same sense of covenant which is “treat people with respect”. The relationship with the erotic, whatever form that takes, is both respectful and creative and the fundamental relationships are respected.

This kind of respect that Balaam discusses again looks at “best practices” when relating to one another. There needs to be mutual understanding of covenant and to treat people with respect within a relationship, including our relationship with God.

Participants contend if God delights in us as created beings then God delights in us as sexual beings, and delights in the fulfillment of those needs and desires. The connection between emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical being (sexual orientation and sexual desires) is all part of humanity. Faith was understood as an expression of genuine relationships and how those relationships are lived out in a variety of ways.

Jezebel: Well, I perceive them both as a gift from God. I really don't know why I should be blessed with the gift of faith - especially in a world that questions faith and picks it apart and belittles it in so many ways. Why should I have this beautiful, precious thing? You know, I didn't work to have faith, I didn't learn to have faith; I just got it.

Mary: I think God delights in our sexual beings and the fulfillment of those needs and desires. So it is very much—if we think about the glory of God as humanity fully alive—it is part of being a fully alive, a fully whole person, so I think that God would take delight in if I were to find someone and have those intimate needs met. I would see that as God being very happy and it is very much connected to my faith and who I am meant to be, who I am created to be.

By highlighting the teachings of the early Church Father Irenaeus ('the glory of God [is] humanity fully alive'), Mary shows that she and the other participants have resources for practical wisdom beyond the present culture's insights and limitations. Participants believe that God created humans to use their gifts and abilities, live to the fullness of their potential, and love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Living into being fully alive involves an acceptance that God rejoices in us, in all that we are, including our sexuality.

Esther: Being in my body, and that includes sexually, to me is very sacred, and I think some of the most holy moments that I feel are when I am working out or feel my heart pounding in me and feel myself sweating. I am very physical that way. I include that in intimate relationships, and in my previous intimate relationship, the act of being intimate with someone—there can be very sacred connection in that.

The sacred connection unites mind, body, and spirit in relationships with self, others, and God.

What Erotic Souls Need

As humans we seek relationships. Participants are looking for deeper connections when exploring faithful expressions including trying out relationships that are not satisfying in the long term, making mistakes about who may be a suitable intimate partner, and so on. They regard loving relationships between people as holy and sacred, but recognize that faith and sexuality could get complicated:

Sarah: Finding someone who is a friend first and foremost. Someone I feel safe with. Someone I can laugh with and just put my guard down and that I can be all my sides with that I don't have to put on the suit that says, "Oh, I'm a minister and I'm holy and I'm perfect." Because I'm not, I'm imperfect and make mistakes, earthy and messy and wonderful.

Jezebel: I always felt my faith was a gift and my sexuality—though it has been a source of pain, my search for intimacy has been a source of pain, leading to divorces and relationship breakdowns—it has also been a sense of tremendous joy. Not just physical pleasures but the pleasures of intimacy... you know, emotional intimacy with someone.

Seeing sexuality as both a source of pain and joy shows the complicated qualities that comes with building intimate relationships. It is hard to be single after experiencing the good and bad of an intimate relationship. We long for physical touch even though it may not be sexual touch. Participants admit that they miss physical closeness and Jacob reveals that he misses having sex.

Jacob: For example you know I really missed having sex. So I sometimes wonder when I'm looking for someone is it that physical satisfaction?

Like Jacob, some respondents talked about feelings of loneliness and how easy it can be to go quickly into a relationship to fill that void. Others talked about learning to embrace that void and indicated that being intentional about self-care recognizes the gift of our creation with respect and gratitude to God. It is one aspect of a deeper invitation into faith and helps a clergy person turn to God with feelings of sadness and loneliness.

Sarah: Trust your inner voice, believe in yourself, give yourself time and space to grieve and to be strong. Do incredibly good self-care because you are worth it.

Stephane: It has been an ongoing challenge to find personal time in the midst of an all-consuming profession. We need recognition that people should have the opportunity to renew and personal things are not always appreciated in church circles.

Finding personal time can be difficult since self-care may appear to take time away from the duties of the church. The real challenge is trying to balance the needs of the church, its people, and ministry without sacrificing ourselves totally to allow time, space, and energy for new relationships. The erotic soul needs room to play.

The importance of keeping personal time separate from ministry is part of the formation of a clergy person's identity and helps in recognizing and honouring personal boundaries. Meeting the needs of an erotic soul demands that we set aside Sabbath time. Personal time for restoration is difficult, but important to claim as clergy.

Sarah: I eat well, I exercise, and I laugh whenever I can. I surround myself with people who have prayed me through a lot and people who have been delightful and fun. Sleep when I need to sleep and ask for compassionate days when I need them.

Among the ways to accomplish this might be to only pick up work related emails and non-urgent phone messages in the office. Some clergy even commute into the Pastoral

Charge they serve. This creates a natural barrier, keeping personal space and work separate, though this often used expression implies the liberal private/public split. Some participants even went as far as to state they do not invite congregants to their place for dinner, visit, or study groups but instead keep their personal space out of bounds.

Balaam: I know for example some colleagues in ministry who will never have a friend who is a member of their congregation, or colleagues that would never go and stay at a parishioner's cottage. I do those things. I tend to be in the middle somewhere or even slightly to the relaxed side of maintaining those kinds of boundaries.

Stephane: I think we need more understanding and coping skills on how we integrate personal life and professional life. My one regret is that my church work took precedence almost all of the time and I can't recreate opportunities to be with my kids when they were younger or do family things I neglected because I was doing other things.

This kind of respect is to be honoured in all relationships. All participants are very clear about setting appropriate boundaries with their pastoral relationships that follow the standard of ethical practices of The United Church of Canada. Esther looks at transparency within relations in a Pastoral Charge:

Esther: The first important thing to me would be to say we cannot be in a pastoral relationship, like me and this person. No matter how affiliated or loosely affiliated they are with the church would be to say "I can't be your minister even if we are only going to explore different types of relationship," and make sure they are aware of that and that they have other support systems in place, like connect them with another minister that they could talk to if they needed to or whatever. The same with their families. Depending how serious it would get and how quickly things could move, I mean at some point it would have to be revealed to the congregation and I would probably do that through the M & P committee. You wouldn't want rumors to be starting or anything like that so I would leave it in open communication about it. And just make sure the other person has their proper supports in place.

No matter how connected the congregant is with the church they attend, the clergy must be clear that they can't maintain both a pastoral and personal relationship with that

congregant. Participants articulate a great sense of respect for their pastoral relationships and have deep feelings about the need to honour that covenant. Even if some boundaries are relaxed, the one around sexuality is not. There are so many ethical and legal issues tied into boundaries in ministry that there need to be clear professional lines adhered to. The United Church of Canada's 2008 document, *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel*, helps make these boundaries very clear when it comes to personal relationships and professional conduct. The document states:

“God’s intention for all human relationships is that they be faithful, responsible, just, loving, health-giving, healing, and sustaining of community and self” (“Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality,” 1988). Therefore, ministry personnel are called to

- a) abide by and faithfully live out the explicit policies and procedures on sexual abuse (sexual harassment, pastoral sexual misconduct, sexual assault) and child abuse as outlined by The United Church of Canada
- b) be appropriately open and transparent in all relationships
- c) conduct relationships in ways that honour covenants
- d) conduct relationships, especially those that may be intimate and/or sexual, in ways that seek to maintain the peace and welfare of the community of faith
- e) take steps to ensure that alternate pastoral care is available for any person with whom they have an intimate and/or sexual relationship and for whom they are the sole or primary providers of pastoral care
- f) disclose to and seek advice from a colleague and/or the appropriate body to which they are accountable, and take steps to disengage from the pastoral care or professional relationship when that relationship is moving beyond a pastoral or professional level.⁴⁵

We know that boundaries are important; guidelines are important, but as Christians we need more than that. We need to do more than “update” UCC documents on sexuality. We need to engage in more gritty conversation about the desires that we have, showing us that we are always exposed to others in ways that we might not choose.

⁴⁵ United Church of Canada, “Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel,” Assessed October 19, 2015, 6. http://www.united-church.ca/files/handbooks/pastoral_ethical.pdf

Even within my data from the interviews, the language of participants is still somewhat guarded or careful. In the attempt to guard our conversations we risk falling into the temptation of building facades that distance us from others, a distancing that may stifle transformation. Something that doesn't get recorded in an interview is the nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication like hesitation, laughter at certain points, tone of voice, physical gestures, and facial expressions do not become data. If we develop a narrative theology to compliment the lists of principles in the *UCC Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel*, hearing stories of desiring, in both failed and satisfying relations, we need to attend to the nonverbal communications which can be very expressive.

Male/Female Dynamics

Participants notice how being either male or female plays a role in the interactions with their congregations. A male congregant talking with a male minister might offer some common ground because they are both male. For example, male congregants might talk to a male clergy concerning sensitive issues around sexuality while a female congregant might be more comfortable talking to a female clergy. The idea that the sexes naturally belong to two distinct categories is clarified by historian of Religion, Daniel Boyarin as an effect of unequal power dynamics that he calls "gender": "the perception of sex as a natural, given set of binarily constructed differences between human beings, then, is now seen as the specific work of gender, and the production of sex as 'natural'

signifies the success of gender as a system in imposing its power.”⁴⁶ These power dynamics that split the sexes into assumed “natural” differences between male and female affect clergy persons relations with congregants.

Mary and Sarah point out that female clergy who divorced and are now single may be subject to suspicion. In Mary’s case, a relationship with a male co-workers abruptly changed.

Mary: When I became separated the relationship that I had with him as a teammate changed. I said to him I wanted to be colleagues, I wanted to be co-workers, I wanted to be friends, and he said quite directly, “No we can’t be friends because you are a single woman and I am a married man and we cannot be friends.” And I think a lot of it was based on fear. I was a single woman at work, and it just became very awkward, just really difficult and so that was a whole other dimension of how I was perceived by married men with whom I worked or related and that was a whole other dynamic I wasn’t prepared for. So instead of that relationship being a support to me in what I was going through and what my family was going through, it became a real stumbling block. That was really difficult to navigate.

The stereotype played out here concerning single women is that they are dangerous and predatory, and a threat or temptation for married men who cannot possibly have women friends for that reason.

Sarah: I sometimes think that there is a little more suspect of single or divorced women than men.

Karen Lebacqz highlights this perception when looking at how a woman has been seen as a “bad girl” or “good girl” depending on her willingness to engage in sexual activity.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Daniel Boyarin, “Gender,” in *Critical Terms in Religious Studies*, ed. by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 117.

⁴⁷ Lebacqz, “Appropriate vulnerability,” 435.

Even old stereotypes about women in leadership come into play. Some respondents felt that a female lead minister might get more resistance when speaking about sexuality.

Balaam: I have talked to female ministers in other churches who say they are reluctant to talk about sexuality because men think that they are putting themselves out there. I think that if there were a female lead minister, preaching minister, who spoke about sexuality as openly as me there would probably be more resistance to that, more projection on her. So I think there are gender issues there, they are hidden.

Stephane: I think from talking to female colleagues they are under a closer microscope in terms of their activities and that and so on. People judge and watch them carefully and it may be a protective thing or it may be a different standard.

The idea that it is problematic for a woman to discuss sexuality shows the stereotype of the “bad girl” versus “good girl” mentality. “Good girls” should not discuss sexuality, for example. This is a stereotype that only creates more suspicion of single women in situations where a woman is kept under a watchful eye in case they need some sort of helpful direction on how to be a “good girl.” Participants admit that this is also a struggle for them when considering their own faith and how it has been reformed in a changing, yet oddly stable, culture around females and males in ministry. They believe a healthier understanding of sexuality may bridge this gap.

Dynamics of Dating

Participants want to keep distance between who they are dating and their congregations when it seems like everyone they meet knows somebody, or had a friend

or family member connected to their church. The opportunities to meet people outside the church are limited by the nature of the work.

Stephane: Places I find you can meet and get to know people usually are community activities like community boards or outreach work. For the most part it is the circle of United Church people that one gets to know.

Esther: I live in a very small town and I start to think, “What would happen if I started dating someone and risk that person being related to someone in my congregation?” Or is the congregation going to know them? It is something that I haven’t had to deal with, yet, but it certainly crosses my mind and I really try to broaden them to be beyond the congregation and well outside the village that I live in so I meet people farther away so there won’t be necessarily that connection with the church.

Being single in a small community after divorce means you stand out.

Participants find that even though they are dealing with being single for a second time it is difficult trying to maneuver around building relationships:

Balaam: I was single when I was ordained and there was always this strange navigating of how do you enter into relationships with people when a lot of the people you know you know through the church are parishioners or one degree of separation from parishioners. And the other challenge is: what happens if people within your church become attracted to you and start to court you in some fashion? Both of those things I found challenging back in my late 20’s and early 30’s when I was single the first time, and I was frankly relieved when that ended. But now that has returned.

For their part, participants try to respect their congregations by being discreet when it came to building intimate relationships. They avoid having congregations meet a person they are dating since that is perceived as a problem when breaking off the relationship. Many participants state that they don’t let the congregation know about a dating relationship until it has potential to become long term relationship because of the possibility of congregant’s grieve (in addition to the clergy person’s own sense of loss) if

the relationship ends. Before a relationship becomes a longer term commitment the clergy person would want to inform the congregation.

Jezebel: I felt that people understood my situation they did not seem to be judgmental of me, certainly not in a way they expressed to me. Maybe some people were but that didn't seem to be a factor for me. They almost seem to take a parental and grandparental role like, "Are you okay dear?" That kind of thing—taking me under their wing and as they experienced me beginning to date they were very supportive in a kind way of that as well.

Personal time is important and being careful with dating guards against the fallout if a relationship does not work out, but personal time within a church community is difficult to find. The freedom and flexibility of online dating seems to fulfill many of the relational needs of those participants without involving their congregations.

Balaam: So everyone I was meeting was either one degree or at most two degrees of separation from the church I serve so I decided the only way I'm going to meet women who are not connected to my congregation somehow is to go online and only interact with people who are physically further out. I would meet people from outside the community just to build in some physical distance because the physical distance I was assuming would build in more degrees of separation from the community I serve. And that was actually moderately successful—not as successful as I had hoped—but it did build in a little more distance.

Some of the respondents who participate in online dating suspect it might be a deterrent to a possible match if potential intimate partners knew his or her vocation as minister; others consider that there are many negative images of the church that are quite harsh:

Mary: I haven't been totally upfront in terms of the online dating to what my profession is... I haven't identified. I have said that I am a spiritual person, but I haven't said I am a United Church Minister because I wonder if that might be a deterrent to people. I think the stereotypes are very much kind of the wider culture. The general public finds the church or sees the church as kind of judgmental, often conservative. One of my colleagues said to me if I was to be dating someone and they heard I was a minister I might want to say to them I'm not "that" kind of minister, or

I'm not that kind of church person because I do think a lot of people do have an image of the church that it is judgmental, harsh, conservative, right wing and we come from a very different tradition.

In other words, ministers represent the church, which includes having to deal with perceptions created by negative media stereotypes of the church. Because of this stereotyping, a minister's quest for intimate relations can be quite difficult. They are often faced with harsh judgement because of the stereotypes surrounding their vocation.

Divorce and the UCC

Respondents argue that there is room for all within The United Church of Canada and they are very grateful for the lack of judgment around separation and divorce.

Sarah: I myself probably default to the more traditional. I put that on myself, I do want to wait till I am married but I know that there is room for many expressions within the United Church. Overall there are more congregations with traditional views, but I think the breadth of the church is more openness of combinations, looks, and even people who are married in every way except to the letter of the law who are life partners.

Mary: The thing that the church does really well is the lack of judgment around separation and divorce because I know from ministers from other denominations that their churches can come down really hard and actually if a minister separates they're asked to leave as soon as it happens.

This is something The United Church of Canada does really well, compared to other denominations that might be more conservative: including compassion, understanding, and sensitivity around the issues of divorce. The respondents think that The United Church of Canada needs to continue building on what it does well: updating resources; creating more consistent pastoral responses at all levels of The United Church of Canada; and communicating more about diverse expressions of sexuality.

Participants are of the opinion that clergy need more understanding and coping skills with respect to integrating personal and professional life. They believe that many don't absorb the information until it is needed, but to have some sort of formal awareness and understanding early would be helpful. Expectations in all areas of the ministry need to be discussed, including expectations of family members or potential family members. Participants suggest that courses focused on the practicalities of pastoral life should include someone to address the lived experience of suffering within the ministry context.

Stephane: Well, we have standards of practice and expectations of individuals and how you live and work and act and a lot of it is around you as an individual person and your interactions with others. I think it would be helpful to spend more time either in seminars or in school or in support groups early in ministry—and not just early in ministry but on going. It would be helpful in ministry to learn how you can integrate family and professional life.

They urge for more explicit discussion concerning what we can reasonably expect when a minister is called to a particular Pastoral Charge. This includes the large sacrifices that are made by ministers and their families.

Jezebel: There is sacrifice that you make when you come into ministry that you don't fully understand until it is asked of you. And I would say that sacrifice is made by people in ministry when they move in out of difficult places in their lives. Whether that is the dissolution of a pastoral relationship through no fault of their own it just falls apart. In other people's lives when a working relationship dissolves that is all that is affected. In a clergyperson's life it affects their family, they lose their church. It affects their living situation, especially if they live in a manse, but even in another housing situation, they may lose their home. It affects, if they have to lose their home, they have to go to another Pastoral Charge perhaps in another Presbytery, they lose their support groups. Their friends, their familiar places. You do not understand the impact on you around that sacrifice until you are required to make it and some of us make it repeatedly. There is a tremendous cost to that which is not understood widely or acknowledged, ever.

Participants are aware that sacrifices come with a call to ministry and affect all areas of a minister's life, including his or her family. Learning how not to lose your own identity in the sacrifices of ministry needs to be part of the ongoing conversation; learning circles and webinars were suggested as other aspects of training and education to offer continuing support once a person is in ministry.

For some this was the first time the topic of divorce and faithful expressions of sexuality was brought to their attention. Participants view support networks with those who have experienced a similar situations as beneficial. Such networks would become a place to converse, bounce ideas off one another, and to ask, "Am I responding faithfully?"

Esther: I think that is a good thing that the United Church is already doing with boundaries workshops, but I think that it is a topic that never really comes up. I have been to Conference and to General Council and Presbytery and I participate in all kinds of continuing education and this project that you are doing is the first time I ever heard or seen of the topic being raised. And I wonder why not? Why hasn't there been some sort of supports or groups that I could connect through and talk about these things?

Participants contend that it is a challenge to make the networking connections without the help of the Presbytery, Conference, or General Council. This has created a barrier to helping ministers going through transitions in relationships.

Jezebel: It falls to the Conference or the Presbytery to inform new clergy within its bounds about resources that are available to them and that seems like a no brainer, but so much of our system is supported by volunteers and it seems to fall back on whether or not they think of it.

What is the appropriate role for Presbytery, Conference, and General Council in the case of divorce of clergy? Participants describe quite different experiences across Canada when it comes to support and responses from various levels of church governance. This

raises a number of questions. To what extent are clergy responsible for creating their own peer groups to discuss these matters? Should clergy foster relations with theological schools beyond their initial training and education for ongoing support while they are active ministry personnel facing leadership challenges such as family breakup?

Some of the participants actively sought out their own supports and resources. They refer to resources on the topic of brokenness in relationships, dating, and sexual expression within The United Church of Canada that they find quite outdated and are not very helpful for this reason.

Mary: When I was first separated I did look at the United Church guidelines for Ministers and separated persons and they were really dated. I'm not sure if they have been updated at all—I am not aware of it if they have, and I do a lot of work in pastoral relations. They were really outdated so that is certainly something the church could be working on because they were not helpful at all.

Jezebel: The first thing, denominationally, the only teaching I ever got was a document that was called, "Gift, Dilemma, and Promise". That was the last theological expression around human sexuality that I know of. Other than those involving gay and lesbian expressions of sexuality, which we have been very preoccupied by. So I'm 51 and unless I knew about that document and had acquired through it that my sexuality is gift and dilemma, what else would I have? So I think we are very weak theologically when the last document that we can turn to is so out dated that no one would know about it anymore.

While the church has focused on the more timely and specific issues around sexual orientation, other relational explorations and discussions seem to be at a standstill. The church needs more recent and up-to-date exploration of our sexuality, expressions of our sexuality, and how that relates to our faith.

Esther: I don't know, but perhaps it is because the focus has been so much on the sexual orientation in the past and the acceptance of different types of relationships and gay marriage and everything, that has been sort of the focus of our relational explorations and discussions. And so it

hasn't gone in a different direction and hey—maybe this will be the shift and maybe it will start happening.

Balaam: Let's be frank, we are in a denomination where resources are dwindling and it doesn't have enough time to do a good job of most things it is supposed to do.

Jacob: From my personal experience I think we can do more. The trouble with doing more is you've got to have buy-in from clergy.

All levels of the church need to be part of the discussion to insure consistent faithful responses when going through a divorce. This has not always been the case. Some participants received what they called 'incredible' pastoral care and support from Presbytery, while others say that individual ministers within the Presbytery contacted them on their own but not the Presbytery itself.

Jezebel: So much of that depends on the quality of the person in the role of Conference personnel minister, and I am pleased that the three Conference personnel ministers who I have had relationships with through periods of difficulty as a divorced and single minister, each of those persons have been exceptional in their expressed and lived desire to support me. So when you are in crisis and you can turn to someone who understands, has compassion and sympathy and clear guidance and concrete offers of support, that makes a world of difference.

Balaam: I didn't get a call from the Conference personnel minister when my marriage blew up. I didn't get a call from anybody in a formal position in Presbytery to be supportive. I got calls from colleagues and emails; that was nice.

This inconsistency in responses occurred at the different levels of the church. Some participants had a lot of difficulty with trying to get details like pension information changed when going through their marriage breakdown.

Sarah: It has been a nightmare trying to get my pension, marriage breakdown thing, like a nightmare. To add insult to injury I can't believe when I talked to them on the phone I said "Please don't do this to anyone else!"

Mary: I kind of had to find my own supports and stuff from other colleagues who were going through similar stuff; they had been through separation and divorce. I found others on my own. I can't really say that the church is doing a whole lot right now but our overall ethos of inclusivity and compassion for others and non-judgmental was very helpful to me.

Participants all refer to the boundaries training they received within The United Church that helped them better define healthy boundaries. They use peer group dialogue to help when any situation (or the perception of situation) look like boundaries might be threatened appropriate boundaries.

Jacob: The United Church of Canada as a national body only requires you to do boundaries training once in your ministry. However, some Conferences require clergy to do it every three years. I believe that has been based on the fact that in leadership, we try to come at it from different ways. And so this is how you discover how you are going to deal with it and you see colleagues doing it and that, for a lot of clergy, is really eye opening.

Balaam: I maintain strict professional boundaries around this. I speak to colleagues and cover my butt and make it clear that this has happened and this is what is not going to happen.

Open and directive conversations for participants to share stories and practical examples about boundaries and possible responses to these kinds of situations are being engaged by my research participants. If, as Jacob suggests, boundary workshops are offered more frequently this would allow more opportunities for sharing stories among ministry colleagues about these issues.

Stephane: I don't have to worry about the boundaries because that is clear in my head but I have to be very careful about how it is perceived and understood. I find the best way to go about it is just be quite open. Otherwise stories get out there and people make up their own history and reality that is not very accurate.

Participant express a great sense of respect for their pastoral relationships and deep feelings of covenant that call for respectful engagement with others, including being clear about who “off limits” for sexual intimacy.

Jacob: So there is always going to be in the back of my mind that wondering, “Is this individual someone I would be interested in developing a relationship with?” I must say however, there is a very strong mental block that I have against anyone with whom I have a pastoral relationship. That is completely and utterly off the table.

Appropriate professional boundaries for someone who is offering ministry and pastoral care ensure proper emotional support for the congregant. Participants stated that professional boundaries need to be clear, and professional lines adhered to, because of the many ethical and legal issues tied into boundaries (and their violation) in ministry.

It is important to understand how one relates the practice of personal and professional boundaries to one’s faith. In my view, I see bringing together professional and theological language could further the conversation around faithful expressions of sexuality.

The participants and the UCC resources consistently use both the professional and theological language, showing that both have an important role. Both language about boundaries and theological language used to describe the ministry vocation, have the potential to shed light on taboo subjects like sexuality and broken relationships. Boundary language has the benefit of fostering awareness among clergy with respect to their accountable and their power. Theologian Richard M. Gula reflects on such moral demands:

Its covenantal action of entrusting and accepting entrustment makes fidelity to trust the fundamental moral imperative for the pastoral minister.

In professional ethics, this imperative is called the professional's fiduciary responsibility. It means that we will exercise our power and authority in ways that will serve [the congregant's] need for seeking our pastoral service in the first place, and that we will not exploit their vulnerability but give greater preference to their best interests over our own.⁴⁸

In order to maintain appropriate professional boundaries clergy need to be clear about the serving of their own interest versus that of the congregant. Understanding one's own needs, as clergy, and how to appropriately meet those needs, will aid in healthier responses that do not potentially exploit those who come seeking pastoral care.

Healthier choices start when the clergy and the congregant are able to discuss all aspects of themselves, even the topics that are taboo like sexuality, broken relationships including divorce, and the building of new intimate relationships.

Participants in this study contend that we need rules for appropriate behavior and that continued conversation is needed. As I went through the data from each interview, I sensed that participants were holding back. Participants discuss how difficult this conversation is, and that it was an important conversation, one that requires further opportunities, and others with whom they might carry on this conversation. In my view, sexuality, as a taboo topic, is difficult to discuss at its fullest in a one-off interview. This is where I see both boundary and theological language being more supportive of one another when looking at ministry vocation. Regular small group webinars and online sessions across the United Church could be a wonderful start in bridging the gap, creating

⁴⁸ Richard M. Gula, S.S., *Ethics In Pastoral Ministry* (Paulist Press. 1996), 74-75.

the possibility of sharing stories over a period of time. We need to develop updated theological resources that express sexuality as gift and dilemma.

As I have already indicated, conversation about sexuality and intimacy is challenging and it doesn't get any easier. The conversations I had with participants acknowledge the need for sex talk to be ongoing in the church. Most of the participants indicate that the interview with me is the first time they were offered the opportunity to explore their theology and practice of faith and sexuality. They connect their faith to their sexuality in how they talk about intimate relationships and link it to being in communion with God. Each participant identifies sexuality and sexual expression as a gift from God, one we need to be able to offer each other in our relationship with faith, with each other, and with God. It is my hope that more opportunities like this one will be fostered within the UCC and allow clergy to part of healthy and faithful conversations about sexuality, loss, and brokenness in relationships.

Chapter 3

Sex Ed 101: Animating Theological Conversations about Intimacy

So how do I live a ‘faith-filled’ sex life without negatively affecting my relationship with God, with the Church, and with my congregation? Richard A. Goodling contends that divorce presents a “challenge to faith and practice” in ways that have a “critical impact” upon pastoral relations at all levels in the church.⁴⁹ Participants of this research experience such challenges first hand as divorced clergy persons. All of them noted the impact of such lived brokenness as single divorced clergy. They experience joy, pain, and grief in their erotic relationships.

Sex is a topic that creates awkwardness because sexuality is complicated. In this chapter I argue that conversations about sexuality will further support the work of clergy by fostering more comfort with difficult dialogue and better understanding of sexuality. This will aid clergy persons in shaping their own awareness, and to foster their formation personally and in ministry. This work is essential because who I am as a person is my most basic tool in ministry.

There are, however, barriers to such conversations that need to be addressed. In this chapter, I address some of these barriers and explain the pressing need to establish

⁴⁹ Goodling and Smith, "Clergy Divorce," 291.

opportunities like groups, where open conversations that explore theological understandings of sex and sexuality as sacredness can take place; examine the sharing of information throughout The United Church of Canada and how this needs to be improved; and discuss how the current United Church boundaries training helps provide some potential guidelines for ministers.

The Need for Theological Understanding

In the attempt to better understand sexuality as Christians, it would be helpful to look at the various theological understandings of sexuality on a deeper level. One of the understandings presented by the participants is that sexuality is a gift from God. This is one of many theological understandings and it would be helpful to look at and discuss diverse theological understandings of sexuality. Mark Jordan argues that “Christians should keep talking about sex so that they can learn to speak about it more adequately, that is, more theologically. Christians can do this best by talking first with other Christians, within and without their immediate communities.”⁵⁰ In order to develop a better theological understanding we must take those risks, name our views, claim our misunderstandings, and engage in the conversation. We must look at how those views actually fit within our Christian teachings and explore how our views and practices affect our theological understanding of sexuality.

Sex is not “small talk” when looking at it through a theological filter, but a topic to which we need to bring a sense of generosity. Also, we need to understand that with any open dialogue we are going to say things that are not perfectly correct all the time.

⁵⁰ Jordan, *The Ethics of Sex*, 2.

This is not about right and wrong, but about discernment over time. This is a challenge, but we are made to challenge and be challenged.

Beside our capability to challenge and be challenged, we have a great capacity for learning and growing. Mark Jordan states: “If we did not have the capacity for learning something of a radically different language, then we also could not receive the revelation of a God who lives beyond the limits of sex, of body, and who offers us a share in divine life.”⁵¹ We long to receive revelation, and dialogue around sex allows opportunities for revelation. Unhealthy language is that of restriction, of constraint, of shame. This is not the language that can be used in association with relationship with an all loving God of grace. We are called to share in the divine life and open ourselves, empty ourselves, in order to even attempt to be in such an amazing relationship with God our creator. The language associated with the gift that God gave us in our sexuality is a language of openness, love, and fullness of grace.

If we can shine a light on the things that make us uncomfortable, then we can work together to initiate conversations that honour an aspect of who we are as humans. By facing our discomfort around the topic of sex we can begin to identify the uncomfortable feelings such as fear of rejection and shame. We don't know how the other person will respond. We are not sure how we are going to feel. However, we need to have our voice heard as well as hear the voices of others. We also take into account our lived experiences and the lived experience of others around such discussions. This is why written materials from the past are so important to struggle with and work through. According to Mark Jordan, “Gaining access to the older voices through texts means

⁵¹ Ibid.

hearing enough of them so that we can recognize rhetorical purposes and then respond. If we cannot carry out this kind of engagement with older human texts, then we also could not inherit a revealed text.”⁵²

This is why revisiting and rewriting literature written by The United Church of Canada in the past can aid in a better theological understanding of sex today. This is important in opening doors to theological discussion of sex in our context. If not, the discussion may become as staid, comforting, and predictable as sex can sometimes be. It is more than just understanding our actions, it is about understanding the basis of what we do and do not do.

As I have shown in the previous chapters, The United Church has done a very thorough job in setting up the appropriate guidelines for conduct. But conduct is just about actions; sex and sexuality is about far more than that. We need to establish a place where open conversations that explore a faithful understandings of sex and sexuality as sacredness can take place.

Participants contend that the idea of being sexual is as natural as breathing; one’s sexuality is God’s gift to humanity. This is a prominent theme in the data results in Chapter Two and very important to this thesis. It is part of what makes us human. It is part of our Christianity. Christianity highlights the vulnerability within each of us. We are called as Christians to love with an open vulnerability. Terms like “self-giving,” “mutual,” and “life giving” were used by participants to convey their understanding of faithful expressions of being in relationships. This brings us back to the love command, and reinforces our call to be open to relationships.

⁵² Ibid., 3.

To not recognize that is to be disrespectful of the gift that has been given to all of us. In order to aid in seeing sex and sexual expression as a sacred gift as well as a risk, we must consider at appropriate vulnerability. Karen Lebacqz writes, “Sex is not ‘just for fun’ or for play or for physical release, for showing off, or for any host of human emotions and expressions that are often attached to sexuality. It is for the appropriate expression of vulnerability, and to the extent that the expression is missing, the sexual expression is not proper.”⁵³ The proper nature of sexual expression is to be life-giving and to mirror divine love. This is not a new concept, but an idea that the church needs to be responsive to in order to aid in growing deeper relationships with its community and with God.

One of the main keys in opening this conversation is to be vulnerable and honest in addressing the fact that we are sexual beings. We need to declare that sexuality is as much a part of us as our faith. As Christians we are taught that God is self-giving and life giving, and we are to be the same in our relationships. To see sexuality in this light offers a new and healthy perspective on how we relate to one another as a Christian family, as humanity.

A joining of voices is needed, voices that can be open and vulnerable. Rowan Williams states, “Their decision (which is risky as the commitment to sexual fidelity) is to see if they can find themselves, their bodily selves, in a life dependent simply upon trust in the generous delight of God—that Other who, by definition, cannot want us to supply deficiencies in the bliss of a divine ego, but whose life is a ‘being-for’, a

⁵³ Lebacqz. "Appropriate vulnerability," 437.

movement of gift.”⁵⁴ This creation of the intimate and the sacred connects us with each other and with God.

Our Christian teachings have always taught the Christian ethic of truly loving our neighbour and this leaves us radically open. In authentic and genuine relationship with God, we are to be open and available. This is scary and can be a problem for us but we participate in a community that becomes one body, one flesh, as church. Thomas Breidenthal claims, “Were we really not available to one another, it would make no sense to say that the Word initiated transformation of the human race by becoming a member of it. That transformation requires that each of us be at once the recipient and the conductor of the grace of God in Christ.”⁵⁵

So how do we do that? There needs to be room for such conversations to take place, but we also need to look at how this conversation reflects who we are as Christians. This begins with open and respectful dialogue about relationships and how one is connected to another, to faith, and to God. We begin by having small group discussions on sexuality, sexual expression, and how these are interconnected with one’s faith. If we have these kinds of conversations, then when separation and divorce occurs in relationships we can respond more in accordance with the love command. Of course, we do have the choice to simply ignore these issues, but in rejecting them we are rejecting God and as such we sin. Ignoring our needs as sexual beings is ignoring an aspect of ourselves gifted to us by God at the very beginning of our creation.

⁵⁴ Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” 317.

⁵⁵Breidenthal, “Sanctifying Nearness,” 346.

As Christians, one of our main goals is to be in union with God, to be in relationship with God, and in order to do that we must bring all of ourselves to God. By not allowing this to happen, we turn away from God. In response to this, we need to figure out how to communicate about this aspect of our being in order to fully appreciate the gift we have been given. When we try to separate or compartmentalize each aspect of our being from the others, we separate ourselves from God as well.

Participants recognized that the erotic is something we just don't talk about. When I first submitted the proposal for this thesis, someone commenting on the proposal argued that the topic of sex was no longer taboo in society. Soon after the person reconsidered the position. Also, I was approached by an acquaintance who said her friend had heard me discussing my thesis on the radio. This friend felt a person going into ministry should not be discussing such topics. I knew this was just one person's opinion, but in that moment I allowed myself to feel 'shamed' for even bringing up the topic of sexual ethics and the divorced minister—let alone researching it. Such is the power of a history of silencing or shaming talk.

However, from this brief encounter, the realization hit that when we allow this topic to be taboo we are actually reducing the gift that God gave us by taking the sacredness out of sexuality and making it 'dirty.' As a church we need to do more, or these topics will be hidden away and kept taboo for many more years to come.

Boundaries Training

It is fair to say that The United Church of Canada is very good on its policies around boundaries; this aspect was spoken highly of by all the participants, who saw the value of the Boundaries Workshop. Also, some Conferences and presbyteries offer Boundaries Workshops fairly frequently and participants felt that this was a great way to stay on top of any issues that might arise, as well as to receive feedback from those taking the workshop. This type of training involves sharing stories and situations that can take place in ministry. Such training while important for ministers could, as participant suggest, also be beneficial for United Church congregations.

These workshops foster better understanding of the standards of ethics practices within The United Church of Canada. Again, the open dialogue on how clergy are expected to conduct themselves is understood across the church because of the reinforcement of such supportive knowledge based programs like the work being done around boundaries. Such programs creates a space for open dialogue. Also, better understanding creates better coping skills on how to integrate personal and professional life.

The UCC document, “Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response Policy and Procedures” (August 2013), conveys the following about theological guidelines for a sexual ethic that clergy are to follow:

Some of us are called into leadership in the church. We are set aside and designated as a trustworthy presence among our people. In this leadership role, we have power and authority intended to be used to support the church’s ministry and the individuals we serve. When we betray that trust by taking sexual advantage of the vulnerability of someone who seeks our help, it is a particularly extreme form of sexual abuse. This misconduct undermines the integrity of the whole ministry and the whole church. The hospitality code that we learn from the Jewish and Christian traditions

mandates us to protect the vulnerable among us, and offer healing and restoration.⁵⁶

Common understanding of set guidelines produces better responses from clergy who are in positions of leadership within a church. The United Church of Canada continues to move in the direction of open communication leading to healthier responses. However, in the area of single divorced clergy, some of the participants had never heard of any support groups or even the topic of divorced single clergy being discussed until they heard about this thesis. Participants regard as important a place, a forum or a group to discuss what they are going through and to hear stories from others who have experienced divorce, are single, and are clergy in active ministry. This could be an online group, face to face, or a combination of both, depending on where clergy live.

For those in the early stages of ministry, more practical conversations and training around developing coping skills would benefit the minister in building relationships, but also aid in keeping relationships strong in such a public occupation. Participants stated that by only highlighting our success stories within ministry, or only talking about dealing with stressful but more mundane issues that we see within congregation life, we miss out on how to dialogue about and contend with riskier issues such as being a sexual being in the vocation of ministry. These are not easy conversations but they are conversations that need to be initiated, but question remains where do those conversations get initiated. We need to keep practical applications in mind, but we also need to talk about the tougher relational topic.

⁵⁶ “Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response Policy and Procedures,” The United Church of Canada, accessed August 28th, 2015, 5. <http://www.united-church.ca/files/handbooks/sexual-abuse-prevention-response.pdf>

The literature that The United Church of Canada published in the past offers important teaching tools when looking at sexual expression as a gift from God. *Gift, Dilemma, and Promise*, for example, presents a strong theological understanding of sexuality. By revisiting this document, putting it into the hands of every member and clergy of The United Church of Canada, and encouraging Pastoral Charges to hold discussion groups, we can begin to look at how to strengthen our understanding of how sexuality and faith work together. These documents could be revised and brought up-to-date to reflect today's context. This would mean a whole new generation of those in The United Church of Canada would have access to current literature concerning sexuality, sexual expression, and being a faithful sexual being.

A Uniform Response

The United Church of Canada needs to go beyond just talking about sex. Participants in this qualitative research study look for new and revised literature on sexuality needs revision; up to date information about supportive networks; learning circles and workshops on the topic of divorce; sex; and easily accessible updated policies and information. This commitment will allow all levels of the church have the opportunity to truly talk about an aspect of their creation in a more real way. Even if the work is done to create literature, webinars, places for safe conversations, however, problems were identified by participants in the way information is currently being shared. The participants all agreed that the first step is to adequately and effectively get the information to every level of the church across The United Church of Canada. Along with information sharing, there also needs to be place to share stories. This needs to be

uniform, consistent, and easily accessible. The current model of information sharing is not consistent within The United Church of Canada. In order for information to be a benefit to clergy and congregants there needs to be more consistent ways to share or make accessible information, policies, and programs on the topic of sexual ethics.

This break in communication and the inconsistency around how information is circulated puts divorced clergy at risk of being disconnected from the church and leaves them vulnerable and feeling unsupported, adding more pressure to an already stressful situation. By not knowing what is out there, or with whom they can connect for assistance, or without even a more consistent response when connections are made, clergy are left wondering where they can turn for more secure and reliable help.

Becoming familiar with the polity and ethics of The United Church is important. Besides the Manual of The United Church of Canada there are many policy documents that could be offered for better distribution, in addition to being available on a website. For example, the *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel* of The United Church of Canada document could have a support document with frequently asked questions uploaded to The United Church website. The option of having everything not only online, but a phone call or email away, would aid in the flow of information. Also, the current UCC website could be more user-friendly, with an easier search function. This would allow users to put in key words that would take them to the pertinent areas of a particular document. The current search engine is not as accessible as it could be, and the entire website takes time to navigate through, unlike more modern online sites that are easier to navigate. Currently documents must be accessed by having the proper name or form number. Without that specific information, users have to sift

through page after page of search results. This is very time consuming and frustrating. The technology exists to make this much easier. The UCC could look at better search engines that would allow communication on this topic to be more easily accessible.

The heavy reliance upon volunteers within the United Church of Canada can also affect the consistency of how information is circulated or communicated. If there were clear guidelines for volunteers responsible for the flow of information, this would create more effective lines of communication and a place where conversations can begin.

Methods of communication that allow for an effective and consistent flow of information, as well as procedures on how to respond to situations, should be examined to see how they can work more efficiently across the whole United Church. A Christian community should respond to people in need with kindness, support, and information that is accurate and easily accessible.

How are theological conversations about sex/intimacy, access to information, and setting up of supports on these aspects related? Theological conversation about sex and sexuality will help break down taboos. Access to information and support networks will create opportunities where one can explore theological understandings. Having a small group forum in the UCC to discuss divorce, building of relationships, and how this relates to our faith will aid in the continuing creation of potential guidelines and create places for conversations for ministers.

Conclusion

The impossible possibility: Embodying the love of God, Neighbour and Self

Over the course of this research, I kept asking myself, “How do we speak of sexuality in our current context?”

In the two great Commandments, Jesus highlights how important relationships are. God created us to want to be in relationship with each other and with God, our creator. Participants found that their relationship with God, their sexuality, and their overall faith were all intertwined. They did not separate each component of themselves when talking about faith and God. They instead used words like “gift” when talking about sexuality, a “gift” from God created out of and for love.

To love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves is not an easy task, but it is what we are called to do as Christians. In our society, to protect oneself is a high priority in the secular world, but we as Christians are to live in the most radically open way. We are called to build relationships with others.

When one is seeking new relationships and trying to keep old ones strong, communication is important. If we believe, as my participants do, that our sexuality is not only a gift from God, but connected to our relationship with God, then we are not truly honouring such a gift in our church today.

Attempting to build intimate relationships after a divorce can lead to great trepidation. Participants share how difficult it was to deal with feelings of failure and the sense of loss created through divorce. When relationships end and we begin to build new relationships, we don't just forget the hurt that comes from those experiences. Those who are divorced and single have experienced the highs and lows of what it means to risk being in relationship.

This internal conflict was elevated for them, because as a clergyperson he or she has a very public persona, a persona that at times had him or her elevated to the point of feeling he or she had to hide a side of what made him or her a creative being. When participants felt they could talk about sexuality openly within their congregations there was a sense of freedom and a deeper authenticity in their relationship. The congregation could see their clergyperson as multi-dimensional and as a whole person. Some of my participants feel more comfortable about entering into such conversations, but if we had theological resources that would help us communicate more effectively comfort levels may begin to grow.

As stated, The United Church of Canada has done a vast amount of work in starting the conversation about sexuality and sexual expression. However, in Pastoral Charges, and congregations, the conversation varies, or may not be happening at all. Comfort level differs not only by congregants, but by the clergyperson as well. So we need to recognize where the comfort level of each person is and respond faithfully in order to actively build from there.

I found through this research that the topic of faithful sex is a complicated one, but we must find the courage to face it. We must share information. Become informed.

Grow in wisdom. Argue about what each of us believe around faithful sexual expressions and discuss what we believe in the United Church of Canada on the topic. As clergy we are called not just to discuss, but to lead the discussion. Before opening the discussion, clergy have to become more comfortable with the topics, and be honest with themselves about their own level of ease or discomfort. The narratives will be so much richer if we come to this topic out of a place of comfort.

As I developed each chapter, the rich themes that came to light forced me to confront my own discomfort. I, too, felt that I was somehow hiding who I was as a sexual being from others. I was uncomfortable with the aspects of a sexual being that made me feel vulnerable. I learned that there are so many dimensions of me left unsaid when I walk into a room to converse about faithful expression of sexuality. I have to be able to identify where I am uncomfortable and work through it. Add to that the fact that I am a single divorced clergy person, which brings even more complexity. I had to ask myself, what did my own discomfort convey to my participants about what is shareable with respect to intimate relationships and their challenges? Can these difficulties with conversing about relationships be named and honoured even when they may persist?

Single divorced clergy face shame, loneliness, and sadness when a relationship fails. Stereotypes persist and it will take time and patience to talk through what is and is not helpful. To do that, we must become more comfortable with the topic of sexuality. It is the place where intimate relationships begin and end.

The safe bubble of privacy, that I fooled myself into believing existed, was popped. I now look at how I am viewed as a single divorced clergyperson in a more layered way. I am seen as a young, vibrant, sexual being who is in a place of leadership

that once was primarily held by men dressed in black wearing sensible shoes. Without me even saying a word, I bring a whole new dynamic to the understanding of what a clergyperson is. That can be scary to congregants and to me.

In chapter one I argue our sexuality is very much in the public forum, and we need to communicate this publicly lived reality in a way that is faithful. While we all know we are sexual beings, confronting, accepting, and discussing that reality can be difficult.

In chapter two, despite the richness of the stories participants shared a great deal remains unsaid. I contend that conversation needs to continue about how we currently see and respond to those who are clergy, divorced, and now single. Some of the ways that we can do this is by offering small group ministries on sexuality, divorce, building new relationships, and more opportunities and spaces for ongoing conversations about diverse aspects of sexuality.

In chapter three I argue that the conversations about sexuality will further support the work of clergy. Since relationships are a major part of what being Christian is about, and sexuality is part of who we are, we need to continue to explore these conversations, including conversations about the fear, the bias, and challenges that comes with this gift of sexuality. The research shows the importance of having opportunities to discuss how we build new and faithful intimate relationship. We need to become more comfortable with the topic and prepare to discover a place of conversation and understanding that is needed to move forward.

There are resources within The United Church of Canada that can be used to start the discussion on a more pastoral level. Participants observe, however, that sometimes a

disconnect exists between information shared nationally and that which is shared locally. Participants note that there have been inconsistencies in how Presbyteries and Conferences respond to their request for assistance in dealing with brokenness in relationships. Some found wonderful support from their Presbytery and Conference, while others never even received a phone call. The response from Conference staff was considered quite important, and when that response wasn't there, it was sorely missed. Participants received support from ministry colleagues, but this lack of reaching out from other levels of the church in some of their cases, disappointed them.

One of the reasons for the lack of support may well be that within the church some people are not comfortable with the topic of brokenness in relationships, and the reality of the quest of divorced persons for new intimate relationships. We cannot look at this with blinders on. We have to look at our sexuality, our need for intimacy, our relationship with one another, and all the while, how that is being faithful to what we as Christians believe and try to live by.

One of the supportive practices that could spring from this thesis might be the development of a workshop to discuss a broad variety of issues including sexuality and the building of relationships after one has experienced a divorce as a clergy person. Just hearing about this thesis brought a sense of relief to some participants. They valued the opportunity to express their thoughts and offer insight about what it has been like for them to go through a divorce and continue building relationships as a minister.

Another initiative that could emerge from this thesis is the construction of a chart that displays the proper responsibilities of Conference, Presbytery, and ministry personnel, in the event of clergy break up with their partners. Among participants there

seems to be uncertainty about what one might expect and each experienced very different responses. A chart would help clarify responsibilities.

Since my thesis work at a theological school initiated a conversation with a small group of clergy about a topic they felt had not been addressed before, it raises the question of how the theological school can become a potential resource. Rather than viewing theological colleges solely for their initial training, clergy might be encouraged to view the school as an ongoing potential resource for conversations that respond to the dilemmas and difficulties they face in ministry.

All participants take their call very seriously and want their relationships to be faithful expressions of their faith and relationship with God. None of the participants want their singleness come in the way of that sacred bond. If anything can be learned from my research, it is that we do need to better communicate the love command within our lives. For those who have been through divorce and now are single, we as a church need to offer consistent support, ears to listen, groups with people going through similar situations, and an evolving theological understanding of faithful expressions of our sexuality. By doing this, we love God and love our neighbour. Single divorced clergypersons know both sides of the relationship coin. They have felt the mix of emotions that come with the ending of a relationship. They know the importance of intimate relationships. This research shows that all participants are aware of their own identities as sexual beings, but it highlights that the topic of sexual expression is not an easy one to discuss.

This thesis explores how meeting relational and intimacy needs is being respected and honoured within The United Church of Canada by clergy who are divorced and

single. The participants' responses to the questions regarding their experiences allow us a behind-the-scenes view of the reality in which they live. Now it is time to look at how such findings could guide the future of The United Church of Canada in its response to single divorced clergy who are trying to build a web of relationships. In doing so we are honouring our commitment to the double love command in thought and deed.

The double love command is beyond radical but it is not impossible. It speaks to a generous responsiveness to our exposure to each other. It pushes us to talk. Acceptance of our vulnerability can create a readiness for the improvisation and innovation, engaged with the Christian tradition that we need in our theological conversations about sexuality and singleness.

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Appendix A

Proposed Questions -

1. What is your understanding of faithful expressions of singleness?
2. What has it been like for you to explore the wide range of faithful expressions of singleness as a divorced single person in The United Church of Canada? How has this been for you as a woman/man?
3. In your opinion how does your church/congregation see you as a sexual being? Would this be different if you a man/woman?
4. How does meeting your need for faithful expressions of singleness as a divorced clergy affect your ministry?
5. Give me an example of when your faithful expression of singleness created conflict and/or created better understanding within your pastoral relationship.
6. Have you ever felt you had to hide who you are as a sexual being from your congregation and if so tell me more about that?
7. How are your sexuality and your faith related?
8. What ways would you suggest the topic of faithful expressions of singleness for divorced United Church clergy be approached in The United Church of Canada?

Appendix B

Invitation to Participate:

Are you a single divorced United Church ministry personnel willing to discuss the wide range of faithful expressions of singleness? What has it been like for you to explore intimacy as a sexual being within your Pastoral Charge now that you are divorced and single?

Participants are needed to share your stories.

The following qualitative research study is exploring the wide range of faithful expressions of singleness for divorced United Church clergy and how that is perceived by congregations? A total of six participants will be selected to discuss their experiences and how these experiences have affected them, their relationship with their congregations and their faith. I am looking for an equal amount of participants from rural and urban areas, who are United Church of Canada ministry personnel.

All information gathered will be confidential, no names will be used and transcripts of interviews will be destroyed after the defense of this MA thesis in March 2015.

Participants will be asked a series of questions pertaining to the topic of ethics of singleness and the divorced minister that will hone in on the range of faithful expressions of singleness and the meeting of intimacy needs. The interview session will be digitally recorded and held either face to face or through a secure online community like Google + which is a confidential online meeting space.

Please contact me directly if you are interested in participating in this qualitative research thesis.

Researcher: Rachel Anne Campbell

Contact info: echogirl77@hotmail.com

Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title

**Rachel Anne Campbell
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I am student enrolled in the MA Degree Programme at Atlantic School of Theology. As a part of my course work under the supervision of the Dr. David Deane, I am conducting a study on the range of faithful expression of singleness for divorced United Church ministry personnel and that is perceived by their congregations. The purpose of the work is to examine what ideas and experiences have occurred around the meeting of intimacy needs within The United Church of Canada. The purpose of this work is: First, to increase the body of knowledge that we have on the topic of the meeting of ethics of singleness and the divorced minister within The United Church of Canada. Second, explore how these experiences may have affected ones ministry within their congregational ministry.

Your participation in this project is appreciated. The questions and the project are designed to move to the contours of your experience as you actively speak about what it is like to be a leader. The researcher will take notes and/or audiotape the conversation.

The tapes and transcript will be held in a secure environment until the completion of this course of study, at which time they will be destroyed. This project will be completed by the end of March 2015.

If you are willing to participate in this project, please read the following and indicate your willingness to be involved by giving your signature at the bottom of this page.

I acknowledge that the research procedures outlined and of which I have a copy have been explained to me. Any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction. I know that I can contact the researcher at anytime should I have further questions. I am aware that my participation in this study is purely voluntary and I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time. I understand that the personal record relating to this study will be kept confidential.

I know that the researcher will make every effort to keep all information obtained in this study as **confidential and anonymous** as possible. Names and potentially revealing facts will be changed, thus affording me anonymity. To further protect individual identities, this consent form

will be sealed in an envelope and stored separately. Furthermore, the results of this study will be aggregated and no individual participant will be identified.

The following is a time line for the storage and destruction of data:

1. Upon receiving a signed Informed Consent from research participants, I will:
 - a) provide one copy for the participants
 - b) keep one copy for myself which I will place in a envelope separate from all other materials and store in a locked file cabinet in my home office.
 - c) provide one copy for my 2nd Reader, Dr. Susan Willhauck, also placed in a separate envelope, who will store it in a locked file cabinet in her office at AST.
2. Audio tapes of interviews will be recorded on a digital recording device. These digital recording devices will be kept in locked brief cases or safes and secured at all times during data collection from the time of Informed Consent through to the defense of thesis in March 2015 and until deleted permanently from my device (no later than the end of March 2015).
3. Within two weeks of each interview, I will transcribe the interviews onto a Word document. The Word Document transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer from the time of data collection until the defense in March 2015.
4. The end of March 2015 I will bring my recording device to my supervisor who will check to make sure all interviews have been deleted.
5. When the final thesis is submitted to my supervisor in March 2015, the Word Document transcripts of interviews will also be submitted to her, either printed as hard copies or disposable CDs and deleted from my computer and trash bin.
6. Dr. Susan Willhauck will store transcripts of interviews in a locked file cabinet in her office at AST for one year and all data materials will be destroyed by shredding or crushing in April 2016.

If you have any questions, please contact Rachel Campbell the principal researcher, at (902) 439-1881 or echogirl77@hotmail.com

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of Atlantic School of Theology. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Alyda Faber at afaber@astheology.ns.ca, Chair, Research Ethics Board.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participants Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.