

The Man Behind the Priest:
Being Married to Gay Anglican Clergy

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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:

AST REB File number:	00102018
Title of Research Project:	The Man Behind the Priest
Faculty Supervisor:	Dr. Jody Clarke
Student Investigator	Bonnie Skerritt

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.

Approval Period: 31 December 2018 to 30 April 2019

Dated this 2nd day of January, 2019 at Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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Abstract

In this narrative inquiry & arts-based research project, five male spouses of gay Anglican clergy were interviewed regarding their lived experience within the Anglican Church of Canada. It is important to note that at the time that this research was conducted, the Anglican Church of Canada is a denomination currently in the midst of heated debate regarding changing their Marriage Canon to allow same-sex marriage. The research project explores the participants' relationships to their spouses, the parishes that their spouses serve and the national church, as well as the impact that this has had on their own faith. While the narrative inquiry portion of the interviews allowed the participants to share their stories, the arts-based research allowed these stories to be accessed from a different lens with meaningful results. The major themes that were discovered were relationships, identity and acceptance. In addition to this a sub-theme of faith appeared in the interviews. Overall, it was found that the participants' lives were comprised of wonderful supportive relationships coupled with anxieties regarding identity, often producing a state of hyper-vigilance and hyper-sensitivity regarding their surroundings.

*Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do
a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? – Isaiah 43:18-19*

Introduction

At the time of writing, the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) is on the precipice of amending their Marriage Canon (Canon XXI) to allow same-sex marriages. Despite the amendments not being officially in place, there exists within the Anglican Church of Canada a number of gay priests who have chosen not to wait for the Church to develop a means to pastorally and theologically address this issue, as this can take many years. Indeed, the ACC has been having discussions regarding human sexuality for decades. Alternatively, some have chosen to move forward with their lives and married their husbands in a civil ceremony. In some cases, these couples also received a blessing from

the Church afterwards. The responses to these actions have varied across the country, as well as across dioceses, both from clergy and laity. While there are definitely advocates for changing the Marriage Canon who provide firm support to the LGBTQ community both in the ecclesiastical and public spheres, there are also those who firmly reject any notion of marriage that is outside the male/female framework.

The debate has taken its toll on both the Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church (USA), who has faced similar challenges. The Body of Christ was fractured yet again as in 2009 a breakaway group called the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA) left these two churches over their perceived lack of orthodoxy including the ordination of women and human sexuality issues. To be clear, the ACNA stands against same-sex marriage. On December 15, 2017 ACNA bishops joined with other Conservative Christians, including the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and Southern Baptist Convention, in releasing an open letter on same-sex marriage. This letter states, “many of us came together in the past to affirm our commitment to marriage as the union of one man and one woman and as the foundation of society. We reiterate that natural marriage continues to be invaluable to American society”¹.

In an effort to respond to the increasing debate and hurt on both sides that Canadian Anglicans were experiencing, in July 2013 the General Synod of the ACC passed a resolution to begin to appropriately consider, through discernment, theological reflection and broad consultation, changing of Canon XXI on marriage to include same-sex marriage². A Commission on the Marriage Canon was created and in September 2015

¹ “*Created Male and Female*”, Anglican Church of North America website, <http://www.anglicanchurch.net/?/main/page/1577> . Accessed April 3, 2019.

² “*This Holy Estate’: The Report of the Commission on the Marriage Canon of the Anglican Church of Canada*”, Anglican Church of Canada, September 2015.

release their report, *'This Holy Estate': The Report of the Commission on the Marriage Canon of the Anglican Church of Canada*. Within the report, the Commission “provided a biblical and theological rationale for same-sex marriage that we believe to be faithful, consistent, and coherent with the Anglican tradition”³. Based partially upon this document as well as further debate, the General Synod voted in July 2016 to change Canon XXI. This was the first of two votes. The second will take place in July 2019. In accordance with Anglican polity, a Canon may not be changed until it has passed in two consecutive votes. Therefore, at present, same-sex marriage is outside of the official norms of the ACC.

With this in mind, this project sought to discover more about one voice that is not often heard in the debate, that of the spouses of gay clergy. Therefore, this paper presents the lived experience of the spouses of gay clergy, in terms of their own faith, their relationships with their spouses and their relationship with the ACC. For further discussion regarding the theological framework that was used to situate the project, please refer to Appendix B.

Purpose

Through a thorough review of the literature⁴, I found that there exists a small number of books and journal articles regarding what it means to be the wife of the priest/pastor, or what is experienced by those who live within a priest/pastor’s family. While it is possible to find some literature about this topic, there is very little about “non-

³ *'This Holy Estate'*, 57.

⁴ See Appendix A, p. 22 for my review of the literature.

traditional” families as it pertains to those who have a member of the clergy within their nuclear family. Clearly, a knowledge gap exists in this area. If academic writing about “traditional” families was on the periphery of interest for journals, where did that place non-traditional families? Therefore, one of the purposes of this study was to assist in filling in the knowledge gap by answering the question, “What is the experience of being a male same-sex spouse of an Anglican priest?”

The main purpose of this research project was to provide a space for the voices of these men to be heard outside of the ecclesiastical arena and the politics that is inherent in that space. Their stories provide a unique point of view that will be important to encounter and consider for all that are interested in approaching the Marriage Canon debate pastorally.

In addition to this, in order to open up the question, it was important to look at the experience of more traditional clergy spouse relationships as a way of appreciating the unique relationship of gay clergy spouses in our society. Through looking at the other spouses’ experience first, the research project seeks to determine if the experience of the same-sex male spouses falls within the norms that heterosexual clergy spouses encounter, or if it falls outside of the norms.

Methodology

Realizing that this is a complex situation as the participants’ lifestyles are a matter of debate within their faith community, I was concerned from the outset that it might be difficult for them to share their stories. Therefore, two methods of inquiry were employed

for this research project, narrative inquiry and arts-based research. Narrative inquiry is a natural fit for this project as it allows for the telling of stories. However, a pure narrative inquiry methodology may not have been able to provide enough opportunity for the participants to engage in their stories. As Merriam & Tisdell noted, “people do not make meaning or express it only through words; they also do so by art”⁵. Therefore, an arts-based approach was also implemented as it is known to complement storytelling. Through this approach the research project has provided the participants the opportunity for another level of meaning making, and also provided another lens into their lives for those who viewed the presentation and/or will read this paper.

As there were times throughout the collection of data and data analysis that the researcher had to examine and re-examine the data, realizing that the data was showing something that the researcher did not expect, heuristics were also employed during the course of the project. In addition to this, through the beginning stages of the project, I realized that as a researcher, I brought some bias to the project. Heuristics also assisted in this regard.

The participants were five same-sex spouses of male priests. The only subjects who were not accepted were those who are also priests/ministers. The rationale for this is that these men undoubtedly hold positions of leadership within the ACC, or other denominations, and therefore this would garner a different response from the laity and other clergy and potentially skew the data.

As the Marriage Canon does not currently allow for the marriage of same-sex partners, my recruitment of them needed to be sensitive. Many of the participants were

⁵ Sharan B. Merriam & Elizabeth J. Tisdell. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation - Fourth Edition*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA, 2016.

recruited by invitation from me directly via the bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada, which incorporates all dioceses within Quebec and Atlantic Canada. One participant was recruited through the suggestion of a friend of mine who had heard of the project, and another was recruited through the suggestion of another participant. All of the participants were contacted by me directly before an invitation was issued. In addition to this, four participants were recruited within the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada and one was in the neighbouring Diocese of Ottawa.

Regarding the interviews, three were conducted using FaceTime, one was in person and one was via telephone. All interviews were recorded by a voice recorder on my Android phone. They were then immediately transferred to Dropbox and deleted from the phone. A very small amount of field notes were taken during the interviews. These interviews were then transcribed using a transcription program, Sonix.ai. Some editing of the interview transcripts was necessary.

As all participants were assured anonymity, it was necessary to create pseudonyms for each of them. A real struggle occurred for the researcher in regards to devising appropriate pseudonyms. Perhaps this speaks to how important anonymity is in this situation. As well, although there were five participants, the anonymity of their spouses also had to be taken into consideration. Eventually the researcher settled on the names of five Church Fathers: Origen, Ambrose, Basil, Gregory and Augustine.

Another key component of my methodology included the advice and direction that was given to me by my research consultants. The principal consultant was Dr. Leah McKeen who was chosen due to her background in gender studies and religion and culture. Archbishop Ron Cutler, Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada

and Diocesan Bishop of Nova Scotia & PEI was instrumental in introducing the project to the other bishops of the ecclesiastical province. This was necessary due to the sensitive nature of the subject. My third consultant was the Reverend Paul Jennings who was a member of the Commission on the Marriage Canon. In addition to the assistance of these consultants, as soon as the interviews were finished it was clear that a better understanding of gay culture was needed, and therefore gay activist Ian McKinnon was recruited.

A public presentation of this research project took place on March 12, 2019 at the St. Columba Chapel on the Atlantic School of Theology (AST) campus. The presentation was videotaped with the goal of having the presentation available on the AST channel of YouTube in the near future.

It is also important to note that no physical risks were anticipated from this study, and none are known to the researcher at this time.

Data Analysis & Themes

Before beginning the analysis of the data, it is important to remind the reader that as this is a narrative inquiry/arts-based research project, the data being analyzed is life stories and creative expressions & insights. Therefore, the participants' stories comprise a large portion of this portion of the paper.

Theme 1: Mutual Support

For all participants the themes of relationships were identified, in various forms. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the relationship with their spouse was paramount in their lives. It was very clear that for all participants this relationship was a supportive,

loving one for them and that providing support to their spouse was of utmost importance to them. Interestingly, the desire to provide support to their spouse is also found in the literature regarding heterosexual clergy spouses, especially for the wives of clergy.

Examples of the participants' experience range from Origen who said, "overall, it's been wonderful" to Basil who commented, "We've had a wonderful relationship from the very first day we met." Gregory shared a similar experience adding, "I have had quite a positive experience of being married to my spouse."

Within the arts-based portion of the research, this theme was apparent in a piece of music that Ambrose selected, "Surely the Presence of the Lord is in this Place." In our discussion about the music, Ambrose said, "that [the feeling of God's presence] has been there I think ever since [my spouse] and I met" and he spoke of a Trinity of sorts – the spouse, the priest and Creator. Ambrose added "Jesus is there holding us in his arms and binding us together, regardless of what houses we lived in. God is always there."

A painting of poppies by an unknown Canadian artist was provided by Basil. He feels that this painting speaks to his spouse's work with veterans and his own supporting role, saying "it's a symbol of my commitment to spouse's commitment. It's about love and support and trust". Once again, the importance of providing support within the relationship was at the forefront of the participants' mind.

Another way that the theme of relationship was engaged was that all participants identified the importance of their relationship with the Church and with parishioners. Many of the participants shared stories of wonderful interactions within parishes, especially as it pertains to changing people's hearts and minds. The change that the participants were referring to was experiences with parishioners who were either

suspicious of gay men or even anti-LGBTQ and through developing positive relationships with these people the participants noted that the parishioners were now accepting of them. They also noted that this was a long process and happen through getting to know them over time.

Regarding the impact that this relationship has had on them, both Ambrose and Origen spoke positively of how being in the parish made them feel like they were part of big family, with Ambrose saying “suddenly you’re known by all these people.” Basil added “It has probably made me a better person, to be honest with you.”

Perhaps it was in their recounting of positive experiences that their stories about relationships within the church really shone through. All participants were keen to share their experiences in-depth. Augustine, Ambrose and Basil all spoke of the people in the church being “wonderful”, “very, very positive” and the people making “you feel special and supported”.

Interestingly, Gregory recounted a story about interactions that have happened to him while being a chalice bearer. While he has had people refuse to take the chalice from him, he has also been able to use this role to have a positive impact on parishioners. Since he has developed great relationships with parishioners, they have shared personal concerns with him. On two occasions he has changed the words he said during the administration of the chalice - one time, “the blood of Christ, the cup of compassion”; and another time, “the blood of Christ, the cup of healing”. Each time the communicant later spoke to him about how meaningful this was for them.

Theme 2: Identity

One of the most dramatic points within the interview process occurred when the participants were asked to discuss the Marriage Canon and the reality that they were living outside of the prescribed norms. While the words used in their responses varied, overall, it was clear that something different was happening within the interview process at this point. In each instance, their story took a turn from being wonderful and supportive to discontentment and frustration underpinned by anxiety. Identity, especially self-awareness was a main theme at this point.

Their responses ranged from the straightforward, such as Augustine who said “it’s a bit frustrating” and Basil who said “it’s been a struggle” to Ambrose who was concerned that so much hurt still revolves around the changing of the Marriage Canon. Ambrose was able to balance this by looking to the future and the upcoming generations. Gregory’s response was a bit different as he said: “I think its bizarre” and then recounted the story of how the ACC courted his husband, who had previously been a member of the clergy in another denomination before coming the Anglican church, knowing very well that they were in a same-sex relationship only later to be put in an awkward and stressful catch -22 situation.

Standing apart from the others was Origen’s response. This caught the attention of the researcher because at first there was no response at all. Origen took twenty-one seconds to respond to the question. Anyone who teaches knows that if a child cannot answer a question within five seconds, they probably don’t know the answer. However, this cannot be the case in this circumstance. This is Origen’s own story; he knows the

answer. When Origen did finally respond, he said, “It’s kind of like.... I expect it to be that way. Honestly, yes I could say that it bothers me that we still have this difference. But at the same time I also understand how there are different groups that see it as being something that is not supposed to be”. Unfortunately, the ‘it’ he is talking about is something that he previously called wonderful, but that others in the Church have conveyed to him through words or actions is not supposed to be. How tragic for our faith communities that this exists!

Regarding the theme of identity and arts-based research, this theme was indeed furthered by the art that a couple of the participants provided. Augustine chose a painting by French artist Deborah Chock with the words “L’êtr ange en toi” – roughly translated, it is a double entendre of sorts, and can be taken to mean either the angel in you or the stranger in you. Augustine was able to use this in order to delve into a discussion on identity and said, “it’s part of this journey of life, of discovering [in] yourself the good things and the things yet undiscovered”.

Gregory also was able to use the art that he provided to approach the theme of identity from a different angle. Gregory provided me with a quote from the book *The Heart of Christianity* by Marcus Borg, which reads “Stories can be true without being literally or factually true”⁶. Gregory recounts, “[my spouse] is saying I think you should read this book because he knew from his background and my background, you know, how I actually thought. And so this changed my whole thinking process.” He later added “I was raised to believe that all of the Bible was “literal and true.” This helped me to better relate to and understand certain parishioners.”

⁶ Marcus Borg. *The Heart of Christianity*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.

In addition to this, when I reviewed the pieces of that the participants provided individually together as a collection of art with my consultant, Ian McKinnon, the theme that stood out was identity in a broad sense, and self-awareness or awareness of one's identity more specifically. Whether it is embracing your identity as a clergy spouse, the fact that there are different facets to who you are or recognizing a change in your thinking process, it all revolves around identity.

Theme 3: Aspects of Acceptance

The theme of acceptance was explored through the participants' discussion of negative experiences. This theme clearly emerged as Augustine recounted the scenario of meeting a bishop and not knowing what the bishop's position was regarding same-sex marriage and being very uncomfortable. Augustine said, "you want to be comfortable in your own skin that you can say who you are... Not feel that you'll be challenged, especially from those...within the community of believers".

This was echoed by Origen who commented "the fact that I feel I always need to tread carefully... The fact that I hold back on saying exactly who I am right away" and Ambrose who said "you go into some places and people just sort of turn away and walk away" adding "that's the sad part".

Origen's initial comments regarding treading carefully were revisited in the review of the art that he provided. Origen provided a photograph of a park after a snowfall – artist unknown. He said, "I find something peaceful and romantic about a fresh snowfall... However underneath that beauty in the snow you have to be careful not to slip and fall...I think [it] best describes what I lived, and am living, is the fact that it's

like...it's idyllic we'll say, however...I tread lightly. I'm careful in my interactions with people all the time. [not in the parish] but when we go to events or different churches, there's always that certain... a certain holding back of announcing precisely who I am or exactly who I am for fear of the person's reaction.”

Clearly, what Origen is expressing is a hyper-vigilance and hyper-sensitivity that is needed for them to survive and thrive within bounds of the ACC. Perhaps more than the others, this particular theme should raise red flags within the ACC as it surely must prompt both clergy and laity to reflect deeply on the lived experiences of the participants.

Sub-Theme: Surprised by Faith

The theme of faith was not one that expected from the outset. It was very interesting to discover that none of the participants had been raised in the Anglican church. They were either formerly Roman Catholics or from Evangelical backgrounds. However, all of them have found a home at their parishes and are active members. Augustine noted that after meeting his spouse, he began attending a few Anglican services. Now he says, “yes I can believe in, you know, the faith again and so I did make a decision, nearly two years ago to join the Anglican community.” This was echoed by Basil who said “it has brought me back to the church... And I'm very thankful that it actually did because that opened up a whole new world for me.”

As well as Gregory talked about how his faith was greatly impacted by going to the Anglican Church with his spouse and how this has allowed him the opportunity and space to question more than what he had experienced in the Evangelical denomination that he spent a large portion of his life within. When speaking of the book, *The Heart of*

Christianity by Marcus Borg, a book that he was given by his spouse, Gregory said “that book made me cry... because I didn't know I could actually believe that kind of stuff and I didn't know that I could forgive myself. And that was just mind blowing for me.”

Clearly the impacts on the faith held by my participants have been both very positive and life-altering.

Implications for the Anglican Church of Canada

At the outset of the research project, it was hoped that in addition to allowing the voices of same-sex clergy spouses to be heard, the project might be of some benefit to the Anglican Church of Canada. In the researcher's experience, there has been very few spaces for these voices to be heard outside of the debate within the Church. As the public presentation of the research project occurred about four months prior to the final vote on the proposed changes to the Marriage Canon within the ACC, the anticipated benefit to the Church is that there will be sufficient time for reflection on the data that is presented. As well, this may be the final opportunity to hear these voices while their marital situation is still technically “outlawed” in ecclesiastical structures, so this research project may at some point have historical significance.

My conclusions regarding implications for the Anglican Church of Canada revolve around two points – the Marriage Canon itself and hypocrisy in the Church. These conclusions are derived directly from my participants. Regarding the Marriage Canon, some of the participants had a positive and hopeful point of view. For example, Ambrose said “I think whatever happens, after this General Synod,

we will have marriage.” Basil added “there are so many different angles and ideas. We've met people along the way that have been basically not in support of homosexuality or marriage within the Anglican Church. I think [it is] because it is the unknown. I think [it is] because people are scared to change.” Whereas other displayed frustration such as Gregory who said, “and now that they're still debating the canon, you know with the change of canon to include same gender marriage is like, you know, we have now so many priests who are already married or you know same gender spouses. We know a whole bunch of them. And so not to allow this to change is actually detrimental to the church because people are looking at it and going OK we don't understand”

Which leads me to the other implication, hypocrisy in the Church. I am very concerned that the Anglican Church will either be perceived as hypocritical or actually be hypocritical. This was also a concern for each participant. I had no question about hypocrisy in the church and yet each one named it in one way or another at various point during their interview. Included below is a sampling which demonstrates the prevalence of this subject among the participants:

Augustine said: “that the thing that gets to me about the whole thing is that it is the white elephant in the room and everybody already knows or has sussed it out.”

Origen: [parishioners] “see [my spouse] and I as a couple and they accept us as a couple from the beginning when we joined the church. So... what the... parishioners, what the believers accept is more than what the Anglican Church of Canada seems to be willing to accept. I think maybe the local people are further ahead and are more willing to embrace this than ... the national church thinks or believes.”

Ambrose: “I look at the Millennials and the generation whatever next group. They're coming in next it's going to be. They say ‘What's all the fuss about’ because they're being raised as this is accepting acceptable.”

Basil: “they're like well we just haven't had a conversation about it yet. Well that's not true. We've been having conversations for the last eight years. That's not an excuse. So someone please tell us what the real answer is because it's just nobody really wants to come forward with that answer for whatever it is.”

Gregory speaking of the need for his husband to be married in order to be ordained a priest: “the hypocrisy of that alone was just mind blowing.” He later added that “the Bishop said he would not allow anymore more same gender marriages in any of his churches because our wedding looked too much like a real wedding”.

From their responses, it is clear that how the Anglican Church of Canada behaves in the upcoming months will have repercussions for years to come.

From a pastoral theology perspective, a shift in perception was noted by the researcher. While at the outset of the research project there was a desire to protect the participants from negative behaviours in the church, this had changed by the time that the researcher was concluding the project. Instead, the focus was more firmly set upon the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and his ability to reclaim his sheep one at a time. Perhaps that is the ultimate lesson from this research project – we are to spend less time worrying about the litigious portions of the Church and set about the work of reclaiming lost sheep.

Conclusions

I will begin my conclusions by answering my research question, “What is the experience of being a same-sex male spouse of Anglican clergy?”

My data suggests that two themes are crucial in answering this question. The lived experience consists of a tension between wonderful, supportive relationships between them and their spouse, the parishioners and other clergy and anxiety and fear regarding their identity. A case in point of this would be that in different interviews Archbishop Ron Cutler, Bishop Sue Moxley (retired) and our Primate, Fred Hiltz were all named as being supportive, whereas other bishops were people who elicited anxiety. From my review of the data, the lived experience of gay clergy spouses could be likened to a tight rope walker who must be hyper-sensitive and hyper-vigilant about the context of their environment at all times.

And finally, I came to the conclusion that this work could not be done outside of the sphere of politics. As much as I wanted to do a project that looked solely at the lives of these men outside of ecclesiastical or political arena, I have to admit that this was only partially achieved. I have had to come to the conclusion that their voices need to be heard in context and at this moment in time, a few weeks after Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, announced that the spouses of gay bishops would not be welcome at the Lambeth Conference taking place in 2020. This has created a new controversy in the church. As you have heard from the stories of my participants, providing support to their husbands is paramount to them. I can only deduce that it is the same for the husbands of bishops. On February 28, 2019 the controversy jumped from church politics into British politics when MP Nigel Evans suggested in The Telegraph that the Church of England

should be taken to court and that it “could be classed as workplace discrimination”⁷. I cannot even hazard a guess where this will end up, but hope that a new fracture within Christ’s church is not the end result.

⁷ “Bishops should take Church of England to court”, *The Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/02/28/bishops-should-take-church-england-summit-court-same-sex-partner/>

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Appendix A: Review of the Literature

Originally submitted November 1, 2018

It is perhaps not too difficult to believe that the literature available regarding same-sex marriage and the Church is voluminous. It appears that every possible opinion and approach has made its way into publication. Although certainly the peer-review process has prevented *every* opinion from entering academia via journals, regrettably the same cannot be said for books. My research has found some interesting yet questionable books such as *The Gay Preacher's Wife: How My Gay Husband Deconstructed My Life & Reconstructed My Faith* by Lydia Meredith. A review of this book noted that “while some of the anger at her husband is evident, her ultimate message is one of care and reconciliation”ⁱ. Allowing anger to fuel a book on a sensitive topic like this does not seem to be especially helpful addition to the wider discourse.

In addition to the wide variety of approaches that authors have taken to discuss same-sex marriage and the Church, one can easily find articles from each continent of the globe. A quick search of academic databases brings up not only information and research from North America and Europe, but also Asia, Africa, Australia and South America. Excellent examples of this are the articles “‘Culture Wars’ in a Globalized East: How Taiwanese Conservative Christianity Turned Public during the Same-Sex Marriage Controversy and a Secularist Backlash.”ⁱⁱ; “Anglican Via-Media: An Instrument for Theological Discourse on Same Sex Marriage in Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion.”ⁱⁱⁱ; and “Brazil, Peru Churches End Partnerships with PCUSA over Same-Sex Marriage”^{iv}. While the approach may be different based upon the culture that the

research or article is exploring, it remains that interest in sexual relationships is a global phenomenon, especially within the Church.

However, when we start to narrow in on the subject of gay clergy, the literature starts to become a bit harder to find. If we narrow our subject even more to look at gay clergy in a same-sex relationship, the academic materials become much more difficult to source. Unfortunately, once we narrow our search to articles that deal specifically with my research topic, that is the lived experience of gay male spouses of Anglican clergy, we find that the results are nil.

Therefore, my review of the literature looks at topics that are similar to my proposed research, or touch upon my research, without being specifically about the same topic. In order to carry this out systematically, I began by looking at the same-sex marriage debate across the mainstream discourse. It is important to note that there are very different approaches to LGBTQ issues and same-sex marriage across denominations. For this reason, I chose to look mainly at Anglican, Roman Catholic and mainstream Protestant literature.

From my research, I found that the Roman Catholic literature was largely concerned with issues involving priests in particular. As the denomination does not allow for the marriage of priests, heterosexual or otherwise, nor do they allow for the ordination of women, and has a conservative approach to LGBTQ issues, naturally this affects the results. Much of the literature is focused around the dilemma of gay priests in general, or of straight priests having affairs or wanting to be married. Overall, the tone of the literature coming from Roman Catholic academia was a support for condemnation of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. During the course of my review, I came across a

200+ page book from 2005 titled, *Priests in Love: Roman Catholic Clergy and their Intimate Friendships*^v. The antiquated way in which the author uses the word “friendship” foreshadows the attitudes that we find inside the book. Another example is *Sex, Priestly Ministry, and the Church*^{vi} from 2003, a book about sexual misconduct and abuse which includes a chapter on homosexuality. What was written within both of these books I found to be disturbing, to the point that I could not bring myself to include citations from them here.

The literature being produced from Anglican and Protestant sources proved to be more affirming for LGBTQ communities and included a multi-faceted discussion on same-sex marriage. Some of this literature includes articles such as “A Theology of Marriage including Same-Sex Couples: A View from the Liberals”^{vii} published in the *Anglican Theological Review*; a paper that was born out of an Anglican priest’s desire to offer a pastoral response entitled “Is Equal Marriage an Anglican Ideal?”^{viii}; and another piece from *Christian Century* that looks at the realities of gay priests in the United Church of Christ and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America entitled “Married or Not: Standards for Gay Clergy”^{ix}.

As I continued to look at other ways to discover literature which would prove helpful for my research, my review of the literature also covered the topic of religion and sexuality in a broader context. Particularly helpful were textbooks on this topic. A good example of this is *The Ashgate Research Companion to Contemporary Religion and Sexuality*^x. While this volume contains many articles that are of little importance to my research, as well as articles that explore sexuality in religions other than Christianity, of particular interest to this study were articles on gay clergy within the church^{xi}, queer

theory^{xii} and depictions of sex in the Bible^{xiii}. Overall, it is hoped that well-rounded books such as this one, and others, may provide a stronger knowledge base on which to centre my project.

In my final attempt to find other ways to access pertinent literature, my review switched gears to look at the topic of marriage amongst professionals without adding sexuality to the equation. At this point I wondered, “what about research on the spouses or family of other professions?” This search provided me with an interesting insight. Ultimately, much of the research in many fields is not too concerned about the effects of one family member’s role upon the others. There were only a couple of fields that did do research into this topic, at least that I could discover. These fields are: social work, mental health and higher education, especially focused on doctoral students.

In conclusion, while there exists some literature that could prove to be helpful in my research project, especially coming from liberal Anglican and Protestant academia, for the most part, my research will begin to fill a gap that currently exists.

Notes

ⁱ Christine Engel. “Book Review: *The Gay Preacher’s Wife: How My Gay Husband Deconstructed My Life & Reconstructed My Faith*” by Lydia Meredith”. *Booklist*, September 15, 2016.

ⁱⁱ Huang, Ke-Hsien. “‘Culture Wars’ in a Globalized East: How Taiwanese Conservative Christianity Turned Public during the Same-Sex Marriage Controversy and a Secularist Backlash.” *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 4, no. 1 (2017): 108–36.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nnatuanya, Chinedu E. “Anglican Via-Media: An Instrument for Theological Discourse on Same Sex Marriage in Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion.” *Journal of Religion and Human Relations* 7, no. 1 (2015): 119–29.

^{iv} Gadoua, Renée K. “Brazil, Peru Churches End Partnerships with PCUSA over Same-Sex Marriage.” *The Christian Century* 132, no. 22 (October 28, 2015): 18.

^v Anderson, Jane. *Priests in Love: Roman Catholic clergy and the Intimate Friendships*. New York: Continuum Publishing Group. 2005.

^{vi} Sperry, Len. *Sex, Priestly Ministry, and the Church*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press. 2003.

^{vii} Good, Deirdre J., Willis J. Jenkins, Cynthia B. Kittredge, & Eugene F. Rogers. "A Theology of Marriage including Same-Sex Couples: A View from the Liberals", *Anglican Theological Review*, 93, no. 1, (Winter 2011), 51-87.

^{viii} Henwood, Gill. "Is Equal Marriage an Anglican Ideal?". *Journal of Anglican Studies*. 13, no. 1, December 2014, 92-113.

^{ix} DeConto, Jesse James. "Married or Not: Standards for Gay Clergy." *The Christian Century* 127, no. 22 (November 2, 2010): 26–28.

^x Hunt, Stephen J. and Andrew K. T. Yip, eds. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Contemporary Religion and Sexuality*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2012.

^{xi} Ibid., "Separating Church and God: An Exploration of Gay Clergymen's Negotiations with Institutional Church" by Michael Keenan, 173-187.

^{xii} Ibid., "Queer Theory, Sexuality and Religion" by Olu Jenzen and Sally R. Munt, 45-58.

^{xiii} Ibid., "Reading Sex in the Bible: Coping with Ambiguities" by Adrian Thatcher, 79-92.

Appendix B: Theological Framework

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For approximately the last 1600 years, homosexuality has been widely condemned by the Western Church across all denominations. As the Church largely influenced the practices of the State across Western Europe and North America, this led to homosexual acts, such as male-male sodomy, being made illegal and punishable by imprisonment. Famous examples of this include author Oscar Wilde who served time in prison for gross indecency in 1895ⁱ based upon love letters to a male lover and gay pianist Liberace, who committed perjury in 1959 by denying he was a homosexual in order to stay out of prisonⁱⁱ.

However, the Church's history reaches further back than 1600 years ago. As we will discuss, the Early Church appears to have had a different response to homosexuality and its present is markedly different as well. In the last 40 years a plethora of theological and ecclesiastical scholars have re-examined both the Church's relationship to people of all sexual orientations, as well as the Hebrew Bible and New Testament's writings as it pertains to sex outside of heterosexuality. It is fair to say that these core Christian documents have been read with fresh eyes, as if the Holy Spirit has taken the scales off the Church's eyes and revealed newness. It is also fair to say that not all have been pleased with a fresh reading of Scripture that appears to go against Tradition, one of the important legs of the metaphorical stool of sound exegesis. As my research project focuses on same-sex marriage within the Church, which is a relatively new phenomenon,

and hence not historical, it is the purposes of this paper to look at Scripture, as well as the history and theology of homosexuality.

Church History

At the beginning of the discussion on homosexuality and Church history, it is important to note that the development of sodomy and “unnatural” sexual behaviours as sins by the Church was in response to the Greco-Roman culture that the Early Church was born into and developed out of. In this culture sex slaves were a reality and socially accepted. As well, this culture was so male focused, and women so minimized, that to gaze upon the beauty of the male body and to have sex with males was preferred to having sex with females, even if you were heterosexual. It is this type of behaviour that the Early Church condemns. At this point, I can find no evidence of same-sex marriage in this era. However, sexuality appears to be much more fluid at this point than what develops as the Church moves into the Middle Ages.

Since approximately 1970 churches of every mainstream denomination have made official statements on their views of homosexuality. As sodomy was considered a grievous sin, it can be presumed that the official stand from the Middle Ages to this point in time was an homogenous condemnation of homosexuality. Two historic documents from the Late Middle Ages and Reformation eras that support this are the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563ⁱⁱⁱ and the Westminster Catechism of 1647^{iv}. Although these documents were written by particular faith communities (the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions respectively), they provided framework for ecclesiastical responses to homosexuality across Europe, Great Britain and English-speaking North America from the Middle Ages to the mid-20th century.

Whereas, previously naming the sin of sodomy was enough to imply the condemnation of homosexuality, the Heidelberg Catechism goes a step further in its list of those who cannot possess the kingdom of God. “Make no mistake: no fornicator or idolater, none who are guilty of adultery or of homosexual perversion...will possess the kingdom of God.”^v It is interesting that this catechism uses the term “homosexual” in the 16th century as this is often credited as being coined by the fathers of modern psychology in the 19th century, many of whom were from the same geographical region.

Regarding the Church of England, (and therefore the Anglican Church of Canada) essentially from its inception the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* of 1562 have guided the ethos of the Church^{vi}. Amongst these articles, there is no specific article which directly addresses sexuality. However, there are articles that provide for the use of Scripture (both Old and New Testaments) as sufficient for salvation and discerning the will of God (Articles VI and VII); as well as articles which lay out Anglican doctrine on Original Sin, Free-Will and Sin after Baptism (Articles IX, X, and XVI, respectively). Therefore, the Anglican response to any questionable activities by humans has been to consult Scripture, recognizing that all are born into sin. Of particular interest to this project is Article XVI on Sin after Baptism. This article states:

“Not every deadly sin willingly committed after Baptism is sin against the Holy Ghost, and unpardonable. Wherefore the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after Baptism. After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God we may arise again, and amend our lives.”

Despite these articles being written at virtually the same point in time as the Heidelberg Catechism, there is a very different flavour to them. There is no discussion of

ousting particular groups from the kingdom of God. Instead, all are encouraged to amend their lives when they fall into sin. The question that remains is “is homosexuality a sin?” To answer this, we must look to the Scriptures^{vii}.

The Hebrew Bible

Many of the arguments against both same-sex marriage and homosexuality, and upholding both of these as sinful, are based upon Scripture from the Hebrew Bible. The Holiness Code of Leviticus is often used as a foundational component of the argument, along with the first Creation Story and the story of the destruction of the city of Sodom. The three key passages of Scripture that are used are Leviticus 18:22 “you shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination”; Genesis 1:27-28 “So God created humankind in this image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it””; and Genesis 19:1-29 which recounts the depravity of Sodom and Gomorrah, implying homosexuality, and God’s judgement and total destruction of the cities.

However, I counter that this position is nothing more than cherry picking from Genesis and Leviticus only the snippets that support homophobia and then putting aside the rest. For example, what Christian Church would demand that offerings would be made in the same way as is found in Leviticus 1-7^{viii}? Marion Soards supports this when she writes,

“we must recognize that along with proscriptions against homosexual activities, the Holiness Code of Leviticus 17-26 contains prohibitions against eating rare meat; against incest; against bestiality; against harvesting all the grain in the field or all the grapes in the vineyard; against stealing, lying and

cheating; against wearing clothes made of two different materials...the church in the power of the Spirit has elected to preserve some of these laws and to set aside others; thus a statement made in Leviticus does not automatically apply to Christians.^{ix}”

Regarding the story of the destruction of Sodom, Roman Catholic scholar and priest Daniel Helminiak offers a different interpretation. In his book *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, Helminiak suggests that this story is actually more about hospitality and honour than an account of God destroying two cities due to their homosexual (or more appropriately homogenital) acts. Helminiak writes, “So what is the sin of Sodom? Abuse and offense against strangers. Insult to the traveler. Inhospitality to the needy...The point of the story is not sexual ethics...The point of the story is abuse and assault, in whatever form they take. To use this text to condemn homosexuality is to misuse this text.^x” What Helminiak demonstrates is that a literal reading of the Hebrew Bible does not do justice to it, especially if it is done without recognizing the vast cultural differences between the ancient Israelites and post-modern populations today.

Finally, we come to the arguments that are based upon the first Creation story. Those who uphold same-sex marriage as biblical point to the second Creation story to support their claims. For both sides of the debate to use a Creation story, clearly these two stories must contain different foci. Whereas, the first account in Genesis points to the procreation of children as the main purpose of marriage, and therefore must be between a man and a woman, the second account supports the notion that the main purpose of marriage is to build your life together with a loving, supportive partner.

It is important to note here that Scriptural arguments against same-sex marriage that based themselves solely in the first Creation story, ultimately do not just argue

against same-sex marriage but also the marriage of seniors or even heterosexual couples where one person (or both) is sterile, for whatever reason.

As all of the arguments that are raised within the Hebrew Bible have reasonable counter-arguments, and none can definitively name homosexuality as a sin, let us turn our attention to the New Testament.

New Testament

The letters of Paul have long been a source of suppression for those who live their life outside of the heterosexual male experience. Therefore, it is not surprising for us to find that two of Paul's letters have been used to condemn homosexuality as sinful for centuries. These are 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Romans 1:24-27. We begin by looking at the texts themselves. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul writes,

“Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.”

In addition to this, in Romans 1:24-27 he writes,

“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.”

These writings seem to make it clear that the New Testament stands against homosexuality in general, and homogenital acts in particular. So much so that the thought of welcoming a member of the LGBTQ community into the Church would seem to be abhorrent to God. Indeed, authors like Robert Gagnon continue to support such arguments. Gagnon writes, “Paul argued...that even Gentiles who did not have access to Scripture had no excuse for engaging in same-sex intercourse. For the discomplementarity of female-female and male-male unions – anatomically, physiologically, and interpersonally – was transparent in nature. This provided a much better clue to God’s will for human sexuality^{xi}.”

While there is enough evidence in the natural sciences to disprove Gagnon’s claim that strictly heterosexual acts are “transparent in nature”, many theologians and biblical scholars also counter this view. For instance, Helminiak argues that when you examine Paul’s writing in Greek, you find that his intentions are more along the lines of “social disapproval” than of “ethical condemnation”^{xii}. A lack of condemnation would equate to a lack of sinfulness.

In addition to this, Michael Vasey also argues that Paul was applying Jewish norms to the Greco-Roman culture that used sex, in many forms as a vehicle for slavery, idolatry and social dominance^{xiii}, as we also discussed earlier in this paper. Therefore, we may conclude that abusive sex is sinful, but that is not what same-sex marriage supports.

Theological Perspectives

As I have taken the time to reflect theologically about same-sex marriage, and more broadly about the experience of being an LGBTQ Christian, my mind is repeatedly

brought back to two pieces of the Gospel. The first is Jesus is giving the new commandment in John 13:34-35, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” The second piece of the Gospel that comes to mind is Jesus’ warning in Matthew 25, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (v. 40). These two passages of Scripture give us guidance directly from Jesus as to how to treat other people and how to act truly as disciples of Christ. To do otherwise, might be the real sin.

Regarding the letters of Paul that have been so wantonly misused over the centuries, I would direct my readers to Paul’s letter to the community at Galatia. In this letter he writes, “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27-28). The overarching theological themes here include acceptance, redemption, love and unity.

Conclusion

Through the course of this paper we have briefly examined the Church’s doctrine on homosexuality, and more recently same-sex marriage, through its history, Scripture and theology. However, the conclusion that we are left with still leaves room for personal interpretation which can manifest itself in a lack of support for Christian members of the LGBTQ community. As a way of moving us forward, I provide the following illustration.

Over many years, virtually every denomination has tried to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church in regards to homosexuality and same-sex marriage. One analogy that may prove helpful is found in Via and Gagnon's *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*. Here Via recounts a suggestion by Phyllis Bird that perhaps these last forty years have been a time of wandering in the wilderness for the modern Church. Like the Israelites who were too afraid to fully move into the Promised Land and instead lamented that they were better off as slaves in Egypt, Via writes that "the people of God should look forward to a new future and not return to the security of an enslaving past. Don't go back to Egypt."^{xiv}

May we all embrace the movement of the Spirit that appears to be moving the Church forward to a place of acceptance of all humans, a place of unity and a place of love.

Notes

ⁱ Oscar Wilde – Writer- Biography, <https://www.biography.com/people/oscar-wilde-9531078>

ⁱⁱ Roy Greenslade, "Liberace, the Daily Mirror and a libel trial fiasco..." *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2013/jun/12/daily-mirror-liberace>

ⁱⁱⁱ J. Gordon Melton, ed. *The Churches Speak On: Homosexuality*. Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1991, 136.

^{iv} Ibid. 146.

^v Ibid. 134.

^{vi} As found in *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1962.

^{vii} Throughout this paper, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is used.

^{viii} These offerings include animal sacrifice, grain offerings and instructions on which internal organs of the animals shall be offered and how to do it.

^{ix} Marion L. Soards, *Scripture & Homosexuality*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, 16-17.

^x Daniel A. Helminiak. *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*. San Francisco, CA: Alamo Square Press, 1994, 39.

^{xi} Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon. *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003, 90.

^{xii} Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says*. 71.

^{xiii} Michael Vasey. *Strangers and Friends: A New Explorations of Homosexuality and the Bible*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, 130-132.

^{xiv} Via and Gagnon. *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, 28-29.

Appendix C: Research Questions

1. Tell me about your experience as a gay man married to a priest.
2. How has this impacted you?
3. How this has impacted your faith?
4. Currently the Anglican Church of Canada does not permit same-sex marriage, how do you feel about this reality?
5. What have been some of the negative experiences, if any?
6. What about the positive ones?
7. Is there a piece of art (visual, music or written word) that you feel speaks to your lived experience as the husband of a priest?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences of being married to a priest?

Appendix D: Invitation to Participate

(Date)

Dear (Name),

My name is Bonnie Skerritt and I am in my final year of the Master of Divinity degree at the Atlantic School of Theology, and an Ordinand in the Anglican Church of Canada. As a required component of my studies, I am completing a qualitative research project that is looking at the lived experiences of the husbands of Anglican male priests.

Your name was given to me by (Clergy) as a potential participant in this research project. I would like to invite you to participate in this study and share your experiences. Your participation would include one face-to-face interview (either via Skype, Facetime or similar technology; or at a location of your choosing within 50 kms of Halifax, NS.). Prior to the interview, I would ask you to consider a piece of art (visual, music or written word) that you feel speaks to your lived experience as the husband of an Anglican priest.

Study Description

The purpose of this study is to assist in filling in the knowledge gap by answering the question, “What is the experience of being a male same-sex spouse of an Anglican priest?” The potential benefits of the study may also be important in allowing your voices to be heard in an arena outside of the ecclesiastical debate on Canon 21, just a few months before the final vote on the proposed changes at General Synod.

Please be advised that field notes may be taken during this interview. The time of this interview will be arranged at your convenience. Participation is fully voluntary. You will be asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview, and at any time you can choose to end your participation, in which case the interview will be ended and the recording destroyed.

The results of this study will be presented at the Atlantic School of Theology in a public presentation on March 5-6, 2019, as well as being written up and made available in the Atlantic School of Theology library.

If this sounds like something that you would like to participate in, or if you would like more information, I invite you to contact me at (email) or (phone). I look forward to hearing from you.

With thanks,

Bonnie Skerritt

Appendix E: Informed Consent

Informed Consent

I acknowledge that I have been given a description of the research project, “The Man Behind the Priest: An Exploration of the Lived Experience of Same-sex Husbands of Anglican Priests”. I am aware that my participation is strictly voluntary, and that I can end my participation in the project at any point in the process.

I am aware that my participation is confidential. An audio recording of the interview will be made, and field notes may be taken. This recording along with the transcript of the interview and field notes will be destroyed following the completion of the research project. My name and any other personal identifiers will be changed in order to maintain confidentiality. This consent form will be stored separately from the research data in order to maintain confidentiality.

This project has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Atlantic School of Theology. Any ethical concerns about this project may be taken to this 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.

Participant’s Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

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

Appendix F: Art-Based Research Submissions

The participants each provided a piece of art, either written word, music or visual, which they used to complement their narrative. Below are the pieces that were submitted.

Written Word

From *The Heart of Christianity* by Marcus Borg:

“A story can be true without being literally or factually true.”

Music

“Surely the Presence of the Lord is in this Place”

Visual Art



Photograph by unknown artist



“L'êtr' Ange en Toi” by Deborah Chock



Painting of poppies by unknown Canadian artist