

Healthy Conversations

March 12, 2018

Moderator: Pastor Paul Craig

Panelists: Dallas & Faye Hollingsworth, Liz Mockler, Scott Lyons, Tom Williamson

Liz Mockler:

Daughter is Haley, who is lesbian –Haley has always been a great student, involved in church activities, learned how to love God and live her life in Jesus’ example. Their family motto: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

Faye and Dallas Hollingsworth

2 children-daughter, Beth married with 2 children, Son, Ed and his partner, Warren, live in Arlington, VA; Ed is CIA – Certified Internal Auditor. After college, Ed came and told them he was gay. Faye and Dallas told him they loved him and conversation ended in a big hug. Ed told them he couldn’t go to sleep at 6, 7, and 8 years of age – He was wondering “Why am I different?” He and his sister have always been close, and she is very supportive in everything

Dallas: never crossed their minds that he was gay – didn’t know how to handle it at first– they asked him if he wanted to go to child psychiatrist to give him a chance to express himself to an objective person. After the psychiatrist met with Ed, she said she would be proud to have a son like Ed

Scott Lyons

Family member (FM) asked to speak to Scott & Linda; FM and Scott had coffee and confided that she was lesbian – she had not yet talked to her parents – Scott assured her this would not impact their relationship. Her partner of 25-30 years is a member of their family – active members of their church – What’s important – both have had outstanding careers - FM has PhD. Their church community respects them

Tom Williamson

2 of his uncles are gay – their son, Christopher (age 22) is gay. Tom and wife, Linda believe this is genetic. He and Linda suspected it – he always hung out with girls – did not have many male friends Christopher confided in them – they assured him that they love him no matter what. It was different suspecting that he was gay, and then knowing it – first thought – won’t have grandchildren Selfish thought: What do I tell my friends? Once you get past that, you can love them the way they need to be loved

QUESTIONS TO PANEL:

Biggest struggle for them as they thought about their LGBTQ+ family member?

Tom

What is his life going to be like? In today’s world, it is easier than when he was younger; if you don’t accept them, you will be the one criticized.

Scott

The part of her that is gay is a small part of who she is. Has had a wonderful career and she and her partner have had a love that some of her heterosexual couples have not had

Faye

Ed needed to talk to someone and get his thoughts together – got him professional help – because they didn't know how to best handle it. He's had lots wonderful, lifelong friends; some gay and some are not Thanksgiving with Ed – they invite everyone who doesn't have a place to go to come and eat with them – very loving – a gay person is a person – being gay is only a small part of them.

Dallas – people in the gay community celebrate their 50th birthday with great joy, because it hasn't been many years that many of them lived to be 50 (AIDS). Ed is really at peace with who he is. Does not impose his lifestyle on other people – he says it's between him and God .

Liz

Haley was 14 when she told them – Liz didn't have concerns – she worried more about her suppressing who she really was – glad she felt comfortable coming to them. Husband, Brian was concerned – she had other health issues – he was thinking this is “one more thing” she's going to have to deal with - he knows the world is difficult when you don't “fit” in with others. Anti-gay political atmosphere is a big concern for how their daughter will be treated in the future.

When you love and accept your family members, how do you feel when they are not accepted by their friends/their church?**Dallas:**

Disappointed – I am happy that Warren is part of the Hollingsworth family by choice – bothers Warren that his parents do not accept him – he no longer goes to his parent's home at Christmas because of all the conflict and arguments that he continues to face. Warren told Faye and Dallas that he feels a part of their family and appreciates their love and support

Tom:

Did you ever hear a story where Jesus hated anyone? We are all sinners. Feels they are born that way – are we saying God made a mistake? When your child confides in you about being gay, why would you turn your back on your child when they need you most? God doesn't make mistakes. Tom provided a link “The Bible and Homosexuality” <https://youtu.be/ezQjNJUSraY>

Liz

Sometimes, Haley feels confused about her sexual orientation– Liz told her that God made her – accept who you are inside and out. Sometimes she gets angry – some other denominations have exhibited more love and grace than MUMC - Haley doesn't go to church here (goes to Unitarian Church) – she is loved there – serves the community through that church - prays that the United Methodist Church will become more accepting

Faye

Ed was on youth board of their church (70's) – had some people who were anti-gay and very vocal about it – Ed knew he was not a bad person –knew he was a person of God – hopes that a gay person can go on the journey and feel good about themselves - it is not something they choose – it's who they are. Attitude towards the gay community has definitely changed. Very thankful for this.

Responding to Tom's comment about thinking he won't have grandchildren?

You can adopt, sperm/egg donors, surrogates, etc. There are options.

Is being gay a choice?

Tom: Did you choose to be hetero? Why didn't Tom have to make a choice? He knew he liked girls, and it felt "normal" to him. Being attracted to males is "normal" to his son, Chris. They don't choose this; it's natural for them.

Dallas: Why would anyone make that choice (to be gay) and face everything they have to go through - criticism, being shunned, etc. You can't change who you are.

Faye: Many boys in the 70's had to conform and do what was expected by their parents – many conformed and got married – so many of them eventually ended in divorce, which hurt many people trying to live a lie.

Liz: I stay away from people who want to argue the point.

Do you think LGBTQ+ persons should be allowed to be married in the church and part of clergy?

Liz: yes

Tom: Yes. We are talking about 2 people who love each other making a commitment before God – God wants them to be happy - If they suppress feelings, they are doing more damage to themselves. Did the church fall apart when women were allowed to be clergy? No difference

Faye: Son and Warren are not married – Gay people marry for the same reasons as heterosexual persons

Dallas: God is accepting them, and we are not.

Scott: received an email about a church sign – “God says love them all, and I'll sort them out.”

What is your advice to people if someone confides in them they are gay?

Faye – Be a good listener – they need you more than they ever have – be accepting

Liz – if you are wondering about someone in your circle – it's that person's story to tell when they want to and to whom they want – it's important to be respectful of the person and allow them to approach you when they are ready. Don't pry.

Tom – don't be judgmental – they are still the same person they were before they told you they were gay

Pastor Paul – be compassionate; non-judgmental listeners, regardless of the subject matter. Every one of us has a story to share. Regardless of the subject, it's important for us to be available to listen without judgment, and to respect confidentiality.

Melinda Hammond (friend of Mary Ayers) – I am a member at Providence UMC – want to commend MUMC for approaching this subject – has grandson, Cole, who is gay – when he told her he was gay, he said “Please don't hate me. I did everything I could **not** to be gay. I begged God to change me. If you can't change me, then help me to live like the man I am.”

Faye – so thankful for these conversations

Pastor Paul: When you allow any issue to become polarized, then there is no room for civil conversation. So often, our culture focuses on demonizing and victimizing one another instead of seeing that we are all people, flawed, needy, and needing to be heard. Our goal is to keep people informed, knowing what options are going to be discussed at the upcoming called General Conference in February, 2019. Sharing information, not judging or trying to change anyone's position. .

Next meeting April 9 with Pastor Chuck.

Meeting was closed by Pastor Paul after everyone joined in sharing the Prayer for a Way Forward.