

How Courage and EnCourage Gave Us Hope

by “an EnCourage Dad”

When we initially suspected that our son might be questioning whether he had same-sex attractions (SSA) at age 14, I made an anonymous phone call to the pastor of our parish. He replied, “Bring your son over and I can tell you in 15 minutes whether he’s gay or not.” This didn’t seem to be the path we wanted to take, so my wife and I declined the offer. This was followed by a long period of time when we did not know where to turn...except to prayer.

Then, when our son was a senior in high school, our concerns about his SSA were confirmed. The first step, we decided, was for my wife and me to obtain counseling. We went to a counselor who eventually insisted that unless we affirmed our son in all areas, including any SSA behavior, we did not love him! After my wife spent many hours searching for resources on the Internet, we found Courage.

Most assuredly the Holy Spirit was involved! We read the information on the Courage website, learned about an upcoming conference and knew immediately that we wanted, and needed, to attend. We traveled to the conference feeling unsettled and anxious. How would we be accepted? Would Courage truly lead us to help our son—and to find peace in our own hearts?

When we arrived at the conference site we were immediately greeted and put at ease by a young woman, one of the Courage members. While the talks at the conference were memorable, what really helped us was the opportunity to talk with Courage members during the breaks. They understood our situation and concerns and were most supportive. I approached one of the Courage members in particular because of the comments he’d made during a Q & A session. He suggested that that when a son has SSA, the father must make himself more available and the wife must fade to the back. This really struck home with me and my wife. We exchanged email addresses with the Courage member who invited us to contact him with any questions that came up during the year. Because we had no Courage/Encourage group in our area, we found his support and advice to be ever so helpful.

Finding Courage/ Encourage was the best thing that ever happened to us. Because of the yearly conferences we have been able to make other contacts with Courage members and the priests of Courage. When our son went away to college we became friends with Courage members living in that area, men who were always willing to listen to our concerns and to provide us with practical advice and, most of all, hope.

Recently, we invited our son to attend one of the Courage conferences with us. Although he spent much of the conference challenging the speakers, when he was befriended by one of the Courage members he admitted that this particular person “really listened,” something he felt others had not done. My wife says that this was the most difficult conference she’d experienced, even though she was so grateful that our son attended. But she has one memory that gave her a great deal of consolation. At the final Mass there was a priest who must have noticed our son and the distress his challenging interactions were causing my wife. Afterwards he approached her with the observation that our son, in all his efforts and discussions with speakers and others, was “seeking the truth.” He went on to remind us that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life . . . and as long as our son is seeking the Truth, he will eventually find it in Jesus. In less than a minute, this kindly priest reached out and gave my wife reason to hope! What a consolation that was!

Every year we look forward to reconnecting with all of our Courage and Encourage friends. Through all of these wonderful spiritual, educational and personal encounters, we have been truly blessed. Our son is aware of our affirmation of the teachings of the Catholic Church on SSA, and he knows what the catechism teaches about SSA. Even though he does not share our agreement with the Church’s teaching, because of what we have learned through Courage/Encourage we are able to keep the lines of communication open and continue a loving relationship with our son, with the hope that he will one day be irresistibly drawn to the Truth.

Without Courage and EnCourage, we would have been left in isolation, filled with worry and fear for our son. The yearly Courage conferences have been our life line and have given us hope. We thank God for the Courage priests, the Courage and EnCourage members, and for all the blessings they have given us.