

# **COURAGE**

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# **TESTIMONIALS**

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# THE FIVE GOALS OF COURAGE

The following Five Goals of Courage were created by the members themselves, when Courage was founded. The goals are read at the start of each meeting and each member is called to practice them in daily life.

1. To live chaste lives in accordance with the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality. ( Chastity )
2. To dedicate our entire lives to Christ through service to others, spiritual reading, prayer, meditation, individual spiritual direction, frequent attendance at Mass, and the frequent reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist. (Prayer and Dedication)
3. To foster a spirit of fellowship in which we may share with one another our thoughts and experiences, and so ensure that no one will have to face the problems of homosexuality alone. (Fellowship)
4. To be mindful of the truth that chaste friendships are not only possible but necessary in a chaste Christian life; and to encourage one another in forming and sustaining these friendships. (Support)
5. To live lives that may serve as good examples to others. (Good Example)

# COURAGE MEN

## #1 COURAGE: A COMMUNITY OF GRACE

I first learned of Courage late in 1987. My first Courage conference was at Rosemont College in Philadelphia in 1990, and it opened my eyes to the possibility of living a good Catholic moral life, even with a background of twelve years of very active homosexual experience! That conference was so good I haven't missed one since! I met some members of the Boston chapter the next year, and I have been a regular member of the chapter here since then.

I had, much earlier on, read Fr. Harvey's booklet on how to change one's life, and by mid-1982 I had come out of homosexual activity. However, other than confessors, there really wasn't anyone to discuss things with. It isn't easy to live a chaste, celibate life when faced with grossly impure distractions and the increasingly blatant sexual temptation to perversion ever present in our society.

When you leave homosexual practice you usually separate from those with whom you once closely associated. Wholesome friendships are important for support and inspiration. Knowing folks in your own situation, who struggle as you do, is helpful and needed. As your personal life will no longer affirm homosexual inclination or practice, those who are still in the lifestyle are not interested in listening or helping. So you have to walk alone, hoping for the presence of others who understand, who do not accept the active homosexual lifestyle, but do not reject persons who were once homosexually active. In Courage I found that presence.

My experience with the men and women of Courage I've met has been quite positive. These folks are sincere, striving to be chaste, and are up-front about the struggle to live moral Catholic lives. I find them a strengthening and inspirational presence in the walk and work of chaste living. Having good examples of men and women living good lives around you is important,

both for spiritual formation and progress.

Another thing I've noticed is that nearly all of them are in some way active in their parishes or other Catholic corporal or spiritual works of mercy. They daily strive to live the Faith. Some are Lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, visitors to the sick or homebound, volunteer workers in hospitals or kitchens serving the homeless. Many are daily communicants, pray the Liturgy of the Hours, and are generous in works of grace and charity.

It is my experience that working, and often struggling, to live The Five Goals of Courage leads directly to Jesus Christ. Living the Goals isn't easy, but certainly is worth the effort required. Living the Goals of Courage brings no magical instant end to temptation or other personal sexual difficulties. There is no promise of immediate success in overcoming homosexual desire, nor is there any all-at-once deliverance. Real life isn't like that. But if you live the Goals, change does come, and your life changes, too.

There is at first much daily striving, requiring a steadfast commitment to The Five Goals and God's call to holiness. It is necessary to make The Five Goals an integral element of one's body and soul, mind and heart, intellect and will. And it is worth the work and effort involved! The sacraments, chastity, and the willingness to live a celibate life work, but you also have to work at it! There are no free rides. You have to walk the walk. And thanks to God's grace, it can be done.

From my own research, I found that Courage is the only Catholic ministry for homosexually-inclined lay persons which is clearly, forthrightly, and unreservedly committed to the Church's teachings on human sexuality. There is no false

hope raised that the Church will change her teaching on the immorality of homosexual activity and eventually approve it, for indeed, she never can do so. Unlike reductionist ministries to “gays” and “lesbians” which say one thing but do something quite different, Courage does not dishonor human persons by negatively labeling them as sexual acts, attitudes, or inclinations. Courage calls all that are homosexually active to come out of homosexual living and follow Jesus Christ. Courage teaches the truth about homosexuality.

With regular meetings, informed and practical discussions, days of recollection, Mass, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and good, wholesome celibate friendships, Courage provides the real tools for authentic Catholic moral living present and available to all who participate. I think every diocesan Bishop would be wise to establish a Courage chapter in his diocese to help folks struggling with same-sex attractions to live chastely. Diocesan Courage chapters, under the spiritual direction and guidance of good holy priests, will immensely help homosexually-inclined persons come out of the lifestyle, return to the sacraments, and develop sanctity of life. At first the numbers will be small, but they'll grow.

I'm glad Courage exists. As a person once homosexually active, I think it is one of the best things that developed in the Church as a response to the Second Vatican Council's “call to holiness.” Courage surely had to have been formed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. No other reason could possibly explain it. Courage is a community of grace. May it prosper.

Steve C – Boston, Massachusetts, USA

## #2 GRACE PREVAILS

My earliest memories are largely of my battle with the effects of polio which I contracted when I was two years of age. I spent years in rehabilitation where I was pampered, protected, and loved, but also left mostly alone in hospital wards and my bedroom.

Yet, I delighted in God's creation. Once I recovered and was able to get around, I would take my microscope to the bayous to see the wonders of the invisible world or sit motionless for hours in the woods so that, being invisible to the wildlife, I might see them going about their lives. Life was beautiful, awesome, and a thing of wonder.

It was in the high school yard that I first learned about sex. The naiveté of my 16 years quickly vanished when I heard my school mates describing the joys of solitary sex. I knew my faith well enough to understand that things such as this were forbidden; still, it was being done by boys who were Catholics, so I thought it must be all right. I experimented and quickly found out that it was not all right, as far as my conscience was concerned. I asked God's forgiveness, but owing to the pleasure of the experience and my desire to be one of the guys, I soon fell into a degrading habit. I was always the quiet one, having spent a great deal of time by myself. That did not bother me until I began to feel different when around "worldly" kids, those caught up in the city life, drinking, cars, sex, and pornography. I was not involved in those things yet, but I was curious about them. I started inclining toward hero worship. Anyone whom I very much liked and who seemed to like me, despite my feelings of inferiority, I idolized. My journey to homosexuality was beginning. I started fantasizing about my heroes, and my feelings about being different were growing stronger. On dates with girls, I felt threatened and wanted to be with my friends.

I was 17 when I learned that there was such a state as homosexuality and that homosexuals had their own bars. I was at once fascinated and frightened. My curiosity would not let me alone, so one afternoon I went to a dark dirty little bar

and got picked up. In the midst of the thrill, it seemed that my whole being was accusing me of being the filth of the earth. I ran away after that experience, but two months later I went back. I never thought to go to confession or to get any help from anyone. I was a homosexual, and no one could help me except someone who shared my experience. That was the way I thought, and so I began to seek out those who were the same as I was. I became a regular at the bars that catered to the younger crowd, people with whom I thought I had more in common.

In college, I discovered the wonderful world of drugs: LSD, uppers, downers, marijuana, and anything else I could get my hands on to silence the noise in my head. I went away to school, but I would spend weekends with friends so that I could go to the bars. The bars were my life. Needless to say, my grades suffered; I was a barely passing student. College was one big party, so I continued in it for seven years, until it was getting ridiculous for me to remain. With the drugs and the hiding of my sexual activity from my family, things were not really grand. Depression was a constant friend. I did not like myself, but the drugs and alcohol kept me from thinking about my situation too much – except in those rare moments when I wanted to kill myself.

I decided to go into hotel/restaurant work where the responsibility was nil and the money for a single guy was pretty good. An additional asset was that it was primarily staffed by gays with whom I could feel secure. I could also have the freedom to travel and work in different places around the country.

Being inclined to experimentation, I began to indulge in the more perverse forms of sexual activity. I did anything to please any possible lover. As time went on, it seemed that the gay culture as a whole was progressing in the same way. I was trying to keep up. This was my life for years; I was going from bad to worse. I was always looking for what I could never find, for it only existed in fantasy. The worst of the matter was that

I could not stop, as much as I tried. It seemed that my life was beyond my control. I began to hate myself for my inability to stop. No matter where I went or what I did, I could not escape the gay culture. It had me firmly locked in its grip. Sex -- or the search of it -- preoccupied my time entirely. Life had no meaning for me anymore. I felt that I could not have any normal friends without using them, nor have any friends who were not worth using. Death was becoming very attractive to me, but my Roman Catholic upbringing would not let me do any violence to my life. I began to emotionally withdraw into myself, occasionally picking up a prostitute to fulfill a fantasy. I really wanted out of this life.

One day in 1987 while waiting on my boss's wife and some of her woman friends, I caught bits and pieces of a conversation they were having about apparitions, the Blessed Mother, and a place called Medugorje. Not knowing what they were talking about, but eager to find out, I began to give them excellent service to try to understand what was going on. When her husband came in to say hi to them, I swore to myself that no one was getting any more food until someone told me what this was all about. I cornered my boss outside the room and asked him about Medugorje. When he told me about the messages from the Mother of God, I immediately began to put all of them into action.

Not having been to church in 23 years, I went out and bought myself a rosary and from that day on began praying it and praying in church for three hours every day. That day was the last day that I touched any drugs, permitted myself any sexual activity or, except moderately on special occasions, took any alcohol. I stopped watching television and began in earnest to study my faith. I read about meditation and began to practice it. Within two weeks, I moved back in with my parents; I gave them back the son I had killed so many years before.

Shortly after that I received the grace of a "conversion experience." Some call it being "born again." Whatever you want to call it, I was introduced to the Lord of the Living. I became alive in my heart. I knew what it meant to love again, and I wanted only to live the messages of the

Blessed Mother at Medugorje. I have been going to Mass and receiving Holy Communion daily these past five years. Every day I spend time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and pray 15 decades of the Rosary. Where once there was only self-indulgence, now there is a life of prayer.

At the Courage conference in 1990, I became convinced about the merits of Courage, and afterwards I was instrumental in getting a chapter started in my own city. I am still going strong and looking for ways to get the message of Courage out to all the gay areas. My love for Jesus Christ keeps growing.

There was a time in my youth when I was in love with life, so to speak. Now I have found the Author of that life, and I am the more deeply in love with Him for the life He gave back to me and the power He gave me to say no to the life I used to live, but now detest. I thank Him for the Blessed Mother's apparitions that gave me the way back and showed me how to keep that freedom. I look back on the life I lived with deep remorse, as it was 23 years of living a LIE. But thanks to Jesus and Mary, I am now living the TRUTH and loving every moment of it. My prayer is that I might do all I can to help others out of that lifestyle. Courage is one way, and we who are members of Courage need to help each other find ways to reach out and help our brothers and sisters struggling with same-sex attractions.

Pat – New Orleans

### #3 THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF A HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVIST

Dear Father Harvey: I read your call for letters in the Courage Newsletter, so I thought I would take a stab at it. I can't really speak from too much experience directly with Courage since I have only recently gotten involved on a regular basis, but I can tell you something of what I have already found helpful about the organization.

To be Christ's disciple in the current American society often means having to take a counter-culture approach. The broader society says sex is the be all and end all of human communication and love; Christ says true love and communication is chaste or married. The broader society says get what you can while you can; Christ says choose eternal things over those that can be stolen or decay. The broader society (particularly "gay" society) says human value and worth are tied to youth, appearance, and money; Christ says don't look at people through those eyes. Look at people through His eyes.

Such a system of values, which stands so opposed to the culture in which it is immersed, cannot flourish in isolated individuals, but needs the reflection and support of others who share it. Courage provides one source of that reflection and support.

Before I made the decision for a chaste life, when I was still a homosexual activist, I considered Courage alternately as either silly or dangerous. Meetings of such a group, I thought, were bound to be dismal, guilt-ridden, and unhappy affairs with members held in bondage to the slavish teaching of an essentially medieval Church.

Since coming to Courage, I am cheered at how open and sincere everyone has been. When there are things to be happy about, which is often, people do laugh genuinely and when there are things that bring empathy, people are empathetic. In a world where communication has come to mean less and less the sharing of who one really is, the environment of an average Courage meeting seems like that of an oasis in a

vast desert.

I would like to close this letter by thanking you twice over. Once for Courage generally, since I know it has taken a deep well of conviction and courage on your part to stand in the face of groups like Dignity and uphold what the Gospel says; and also for your book *The Homosexual Person*, which lays out the Church's position in such clear and concise terms that it contributed to my decision to request full communion with Rome.

(D.-VA.) +++

## #4 LOVE THAT SPEAKS

As a Catholic and homosexually-oriented man, I am deeply grateful to the Roman Catholic Church for its position on homosexuality and homosexual acts. Roman Catholicism, almost alone among Christendom's churches, refuses to patronize persons with homosexual inclinations by presenting a watered down gospel or brutalize them with a message of irredeemable hostility.

The Roman Catholic Church loves me and all others like me who experience same-sex attractions, looks at us as the adults we are, and says that we too can resolutely cooperate with the Holy Spirit to sanctify our lives. We are called to sainthood and the narrow road that brings us there.

I did not recognize the value of this teaching easily. From the age of 21 to 28, I lived as a gay activist, accepting and preaching the message the gay community offers today: active homosexuality, as long as it is practiced safely and in commitment, is no worse than heterosexual activity under the same guidelines. Scriptural or other moral teachings which argued otherwise were simply out-of-date and were probably authored by "homophobes."

I speedily went about accumulating the things that made up a successful gay life. I took a lover for a long term relationship, got on the fast track at work, and vacationed at gay resorts. My friends were gay, my relationship was gay, my workplace was gay-friendly, and my life seemed filled with youth and pleasure.

But I was not happy. My heart tossed restlessly, as had St. Augustine's, and every new pleasure brought only sharper pangs. After having so much of what the gay world took for granted, it wasn't enough. In the early spring of my twenty-eighth year I turned my life over to Jesus Christ and began to explore what taking up my cross meant.

That exploration led me gradually, and with many

fits and starts, to the Roman Catholic Church where I have lived, gratefully, ever since. The Church's teaching on homosexual orientation and chastity have been two great liberators on my journey. The uniqueness of Catholic teaching on homosexual orientation stems mainly from its lack of determinism.

Men and women with a homosexual orientation are neither automatically candidates for praise (on the grounds of their being oppressed) nor damnation (on account of inherent sinfulness). Just like everyone else, they can choose either good or evil. This is a position filled with respect because it recognizes us as being children of God and not mere beasts subject to instinct alone.

The Church's corollary position, that persons with homosexual inclinations are called to chastity, also contributes to this teaching's unique expression of grace because of what it teaches about love. Contemporary culture is filled with counterfeits to love. We say we "love" food, "love" our pets, "love" the outdoors, "love" our parents and children, and "love" our spouses. But so much of the time, we do not love them as much as what they can do for us. We love food for its taste, pets for their companionship, the outdoor for its beauty. And we often bind up our love for parents, children and spouses with conditions, then tinge it with self-interest.

This has played out most strongly in my experience of life before committing to chastity, as well as afterwards. When I was homosexually active with my partner, we would sometimes call our sexual acts "making love," but it was not so much love as utility. Each made the other, with their consent, a means to an end. But that is not love. And it contrasts sharply with my experience after committing myself to chastity.

To the surprise of almost everyone, and in defiance of all attempts to label us, our relationship has continued after our ceasing sexual activity. We found that our emotional commitment to one

another and to our joint life together grew after we stopped having sex because it was a wonderful realization that what we meant to one another extends far past our bedroom door.

All of us want, and deserve to be accepted at a deep emotional level for who we are, not for whether we can fill another's needs. Paradoxically, this kind of emotional commitment suffers most when sex becomes part of a friendship. Chaste love can be difficult at times, but then so can all living in truth.

I give thanks to God that the Catholic Church understands this well enough to teach it, and to have supported an organization called Courage, which exists to help persons with same-sex attractions live out this teaching. Over the course of my years in Courage, I have made more and deeper friendships than I ever did during the time I was actively gay, and I am convinced that such a witness will help our surrounding culture come to a deeper understanding of the true nature of love.

David

## #5 CHRIS'S KIWI STORY

The story of how my male partner and I became members of Courage is one of startling suddenness. During Advent – December 8, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, I came across a leaflet in the Catholic bookshop concerning Devotions to Jesus, King of All Nations. The promise of “powerful and unprecedented effects” was attached to a Novena of Holy Communions in honor of Jesus under that title. The very next day I went to Mass and began the Novena. It was during that time (nine consecutive communions, but not necessarily nine calendar days in a row), that I began to have overwhelming doubts about my lifestyle.

As a Catholic with same-sex attractions who had lived the past eight years with a non-Catholic man in a faithful, committed relationship, I had doubts about the sexual aspect of our relationship. So had he. But both of us always managed to shut out these nagging thoughts. About a week before Christmas I went to Reconciliation (which is a condition of the Novena) and timidly confessed, without being too specific, to “sexual sins.” Once I’d done this I began hoping I’d “stay clean” for Christmas, which happened. And a very special Christmas Day Mass it was. From there on, my doubts multiplied. I began wanting to “stay clean” longer, and this then put me in a very difficult position with Matthew. How was I to tell him I’d started thinking differently about things?

The following January, I began a second Novena of Communions, this time for Matthew, and I asked the Lord to help me solve this whole messy situation. Somehow, please, could He change Matthew’s heart, get him to approach me and say, “I want us to give up sex!” Not because I was afraid to broach the subject myself, but because it was such a complex issue. I didn’t want to be seen as enforcing my Catholic conscience upon him, nor did I want to put him off the Church he’d often shown interest in by insisting the physical side of our love cease. After all, it was our devotion to each other – unrelenting against every obstacle over eight years – that

had brought so much healing for him. He had suffered Multiple Personality through childhood abuse, and we had always felt this healing came from God through the love we shared.

After my second Holy Communion for this Novena – Sunday Mass, 10th January – I was to get the surprise of my life. Later that day Matthew told me he had something serious to discuss with me. “I want to become a Catholic,” he announced. “I want to go for instruction and be baptized.” I nearly fell over backwards, especially at the next piece of news. “I also want to receive Holy Communion, and that’s the tricky bit. I’m sorry but we’ll have to end our sex life. I couldn’t possibly go to Communion and be sexually active. It had to come to this eventually anyway. My childhood has ruined that part of me. How do you feel about chastity?”

Three days later I went to a full and proper Confession. Too late to catch the priest at the inner-city chapel I often attended, I decided to stop off at the Cathedral on the way home. There I found a newsletter saying Confession could be arranged by appointment. Heart in mouth, I wandered over to the Presbytery, hoping I might bump into the priest I’d met here eighteen months ago who had really impressed me. He opened the door! He agreed to hear confession. Thankfully, he didn’t sound judgmental when I spoke about my homosexuality, but acknowledged mildly, “So you’ve sinned with another man.” He was far more concerned about my reception of Holy Communion while in a state of sin. At that point, I felt no remorse. In a way, I still wasn’t convinced my confessed sins were truly sins. I felt nothing and thought I should. I began despairing about my many sacrilegious communions and discussed this again with the priest. From that day on I began to have a deep yearning to attend daily Mass (whenever I could), and with each succeeding Mass, I was gradually regaining my spiritual eyes. I saw that homosexual sex was wrong. I wept from time to time before the Lord. I began to experience a profound and moving sense of union with Jesus at Communion

time. I began to recall how wonderful it had once been to be so close to Him eight years ago, and realized I was now able to resume this spiritual intimacy with nothing on my conscience. It felt so amazingly good to be pure, to be chaste, to be restored to innocence through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Over the days and weeks that followed, I half expected Matthew to change his mind and recant his wish for celibacy. But he didn't. By the end of January he suggested that we establish separate bedrooms, which we did.

What has helped us tremendously in our ongoing efforts, of course, is Courage. Courage does not ask its members to change their orientation. Courage simply encourages and supports them in their walk with God, their desire to live chaste lives, and in developing their spiritual commitment to the Catholic Faith.

Unknown to me at that time, the priest I had approached for confession at the Cathedral was chaplain of the diocese's first chapter of Courage which was just finding its feet. Isn't God incredible? Father gently suggested I join. Taking home the Courage Handbook to study, Matthew and I read it together and both agreed to start attending the following Wednesday.

Today Matthew also goes to private instruction with the same priest, preparing to become a Catholic, and I sit in on the sessions. Now firm in his conviction that "gay" sex acts are against God's will, he has found peace for the first time in 31 years and eagerly looks forward to Baptism and First Holy Communion.

## #6 FROM HOMOSEXUAL ATHEIST TO CHASTE CATHOLIC

I thought I had the homosexuality under control. I'd been a Catholic for five years, went to daily Mass, prayed the Rosary daily, went on one or two retreats a year, and volunteered at my parish. Yet, after a series of crises occurred, I once again became involved in addictive, homosexual behavior. So what happened?

I'd had same-sex attractions from the time I began to masturbate at age 12. I masturbated at least once a day, and developed a rich fantasy life by the time I did act out at age 24.

My family life was in many ways classic. My father was a "workaholic," a great provider, but never there for me. He died when I was 15. My mother was controlling and overbearing. She was the disciplinarian. I had two brothers with whom I fought all the time. My older brother would beat me up and I, in turn, would beat up my younger brother.

In my late teens I had a dysfunctional romantic involvement with an older woman. Her jealous rages coupled with my emotional dependence on her made me give up every friend I had during that important period of development.

I had no faith life to speak of growing up, just two years of Baptist training at a public elementary school. The family never went to church or prayed. By the time I entered college, I was an avowed atheist and would argue with any believer.

That's why it was such a surprise when I had a spiritual awakening after a three-year period of homosexual activity and heavy drinking. In fact, my last "lover" before my conversion was a pious Israeli Jew who read the Bible to me in Hebrew. God really does use every opportunity.

Over the course of the next several years, I went to Evangelical and Episcopal churches, read and prayed. I then became attracted to Catholicism because of the Scriptures and the Eucharist. I took instruction in the faith and was initiated.

The homosexuality seemed to fade into the background. The acting out stopped. I experienced long stretches without masturbating. I entered a long honeymoon with the Faith during which I was quite sure God was healing me of my homosexuality. However, I realize now that I was repressing my homosexuality and not facing it.

Then, several crises came: I quit my job, a second career opportunity fizzled, I had no place to live, and a business venture with my brother failed, resulting in a falling out with him. Meanwhile, I entered a "dark night" when God seemed to abandon me.

That's when the temptations returned with a vengeance, and I gradually returned to addictive homosexual behavior: frequent masturbation, watching soft porn on cable, buying porn, participating in phone sex, desiring to have sex again, finally acting out, cruising on the internet.

It's a miracle that my faith survived that period of deep unhappiness. But I had enough faith in Christ to seek his help.

That's where Courage came in. I had read about Courage in Fr. Benedict Groeschel's book *The Courage To Be Chaste*. So I began to go to meetings and met others with the same "thorn in their flesh." I attended a Courage conference, went on a retreat, stepped up my prayer life, and made new "chaste" friends. I read books and articles about same-sex attractions. I also began counseling.

As a result, I'm no longer "out of control." I'm facing my problem. I'm working on the twelve-steps. I'm discovering the "stressors" that trigger the desire to act out – anger, resentment, self pity, rejection, loneliness – and I'm trying to address them as they arise. My prayer life is now deeper, more realistic, less ritualistic. I try to remind myself often just how much God loves me despite all my faults and failings, and that He is always looking for me, like the father searching for his prodigal son. Jeff

## #7 A DAD'S STRUGGLE

My name is Francis. I am a Catholic man, married, and father of several adult children. In the Spring of 1999, after 50 plus years, I was able to acknowledge that my sexual identity was homosexual. Perhaps the best way of telling my story is to do it in more or less chronological order. So, here it is.

I grew up in a household which was not particularly spiritual. I was the youngest of three sons. We were cradle Catholics, but my parents were rather lukewarm. My mother was an alcoholic, which over the years became progressively worse. My father was a domineering type who told me that I would never be as good or successful as he was. Because of his work, he was absent most of the time, and when he was home, he never had time for me. My folks fought quite a bit, mostly as a result of both my mother's and father's drinking. Although my Dad was not an alcoholic, he did drink a great deal. He would come home very late, often early in the morning. I always suspected that he was not faithful to my mother in their marriage. Often, his late arrival would end up in heated battles between them. These would wake me up and greatly disturb me. I remember crying many, many nights and asking God to stop them from fighting with each other.

So, what about me? I was the baby of the family – the third of three sons – and thinking back on it, the “girl” my mother never had. I was not athletic and my two brothers would sometimes make fun of me as a result of my less than masculine physique. They used to call me Francis Mary.

My parents did not teach me anything about sex. All that I knew I first learned from my siblings and peers. When I was about 11, my middle brother who was 15 was into pornography, which is pretty typical I think for teenage boys. However, his sexual fantasies became real when for several years he began acting them out by molesting me. At the time, I thought he was showing affection for me, and since it felt good, I was will-

ing to go along and even initiate these activities. As a result, I learned about masturbation and had a fierce habit. I masturbated several times a day starting at 11. This was about two years before my body started puberty. It was not even developed to the point where I could have a normal ejaculation.

During the next four years, in addition to masturbation, which was my main source of sexual release, I became involved sexually with older boys who taught me about mutual masturbation and oral sex. Although these events were not too frequent, they were my first sexual experiences with men outside of my relationship with my brother.

Even though neither my parents nor my brothers were particularly religious, for some reason I seemed to be. I used to admire my uncle who made an effort to go to Mass every Sunday, and I often wondered why my family didn't. In any event, the sexual sins I committed gave me a lot of guilt, and I would go to confession almost every week, confessing the same sins over and over.

When I got to high school, which I loved, I avoided physical education, even making excuses why I couldn't participate. Thinking back, I believe it was because I didn't want to be exposed to all the naked bodies in the showers. Somehow I knew I had an attraction for this and didn't want to admit it. As a matter of fact, I never did admit it to myself, until about 40 years later. I made friends with several of the religious brothers who taught there and felt at home with them. After I had graduated, my brothers told me that the religious brothers who I had befriended were “gay.” I was so naive that I didn't know what homosexuality was, even though I had already been involved in it myself. I didn't believe them, but in retrospect, I think they were accurate. The proverbial “gaydar” was most likely working even then.

I knew I wasn't attracted to girls. As a matter of fact,

I never went on dates that I initiated, except for those with my wife, which I will describe in a little while. In high school my folks fixed me up with several dates. I hated that. I found one particularly revolting. A girl came on to me sexually and would have done anything I wanted. It turned me off, and I couldn't get her back home fast enough. I guess my parents realized I wasn't dating girls and thought this would be good for me.

In my pre-teens I met a girl who I did like. We had often played together as children, mostly girl stuff. I felt more comfortable with girls than boys. In any event, this one particular girl and I became friends. Once I reached my high school years, I didn't see her anymore. However, in my senior year, I ran into her and thought she was still nice, so I decided to take her out on a date. For the next year we dated, then I went off to college. After my first year, I decided to end our relationship because I felt a call to religious life. I had always felt this call and perhaps subconsciously it was a way of my dealing with my sexual orientation. However, my parents would not hear of it and insisted that I continue in college. If I did have a religious vocation, it would still be there after college, they advised. My mother commented that if I was going into the religious life it should be as a priest and not as a brother, and in any event it was a "waste" of a good man (referring to the celibacy requirements, I judged).

The woman mentioned above eventually became my wife. We dated for the next two years and our relationship deepened and became sexual. I believed that this was the answer to my prayers because during this time I was able to dramatically reduce my habit of masturbation. It had become the bane of my existence. In the summer of my junior year, she became pregnant. Based upon my upbringing and the social norms of the time, we immediately eloped. When we returned, our folks insisted that we get married in the Church, which we did. The Sacrament of Matrimony was important to us. We believed our vows were forever and took them seriously.

Over the years we had several children and a better than average marriage. We truly developed a deep love for each other. Regarding sex,

it never seemed to have the fireworks for me that other people talked about. I didn't think much about it. Once again, I must reiterate, that even at this time, I did not realize that I was a homosexual man. I simply thought sex wasn't a big deal. I was attracted to several men during this time, but I never acted out with them. However, I believe I truly fell in love with one of them.

By the spring of 1996, when the kids were in college and out of the house, I had my first exposure to the internet. I came across pornography. It had a devastating effect on me. I very shortly found myself going to the gay sites. Over the next three years my behavior became increasingly worse. The addiction to pornography restarted my old masturbation habit. I believe I was trying to act out but without actual contact with a live person, mostly because of the shame and guilt that it would give me, but also because of the fear that I might have to admit I was a homosexual man. I began to frequent gay bars which led to excessive drinking, and then on to male strip clubs where I "danced" with the strippers. Next I had sex with men and even visited bathhouses. In the spring of 1999, I was now sure that I was "gay" and finally came out to myself.

I didn't know what to do regarding my wife. However, at the urging of a gay friend, I did the honorable thing and told her of my sexual orientation. It was a devastating blow. The man she had been married to for over 30 years had lied to her. Later I was able to explain to her how I denied this even to myself for so many years.

Neither of us knew what to do, so we both began counseling. Our therapist was one of those guys who just wanted me to feel good about myself no matter how I chose to live my life. Gay or straight was okay with him. He even suggested to my wife that perhaps a three-way relationship might be possible! I knew this wasn't for me. Maybe I would live a gay lifestyle, but this would mean divorce and a monogamous relationship with a lover.

Because of the emotional strain involved and my wife's need for support, we told my oldest son about our situation. His first reaction was to tell my wife to divorce me and move away. For the

next six months, my wife and I had a really traumatic time. We read every book that we could find on homosexuality and mixed oriented couples. We reached out to others for help such as our local priests. We attended diocesan programs and even P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). No one had a clue about how to advise us.

We were truly struggling. We loved each other, but this news rocked the foundation of our lives. I was extremely angry at times and even acted out again with another man I picked up at a gay bar. I brought him home and had sex with him in our bed. That was a real slap in the face to my wife. Worse yet was the realization that I was the aggressor and used him. I was convinced that I was going to have to live the “lifestyle” and was looking for justification for it.

I didn't want to live my life in a state of sin and looked for the Church's position and its blessing. *Dignity* seemed to be the answer. This organization believes that homo-genital sex within a monogamous relationship is okay. It sounded good to me, except that I also read that the group is not approved by the Church because their beliefs are contrary to the teachings of the Magisterium.

As I continued searching the internet for more information, I came across Courage and read their web pages. Over the next few weeks, I had a true spiritual conversion. God showered His grace on me and spoke to me no less than three times through the Gospel. I couldn't have been hit harder than if hit with a baseball bat. I realized that being attracted to people of the same sex didn't mean I had to stop loving my wife, get a divorce, and live the “gay lifestyle.” I could be a man, a child of God, who would most likely have to struggle with same-sex attractions for the rest of his life. But who doesn't have a cross to bear in this life?

I joined Courage Online and began reading the postings of other people struggling like me – men and women, single and married. This was what I was looking for. I asked about Courage in my state and was contacted by a man who invited me to go to a local Courage meeting the

following Saturday. I went. My life hasn't been the same since.

As a result of the twelve-step approach, my wife and I took the advice of many on “the list,” and we began deepening our relationship with the Lord. We began going to daily Mass, taking advantage of the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, and saying the Rosary. After attending a weekend retreat, we began reading the Liturgy of the Hours. The grace that I have received has been sufficient to keep me from acting out, even though at times my temptations seem stronger than ever. Today, I am at peace knowing that I am following God's will for me, prayerfully accepting the things I cannot change and courageously changing the things I can.

## #8 FROM A DISTANCE

Courage has given me the “courage” to face my many weaknesses, and little by little to start strengthening them. What has helped immensely is that I am not alone. Courage, for me thus far, has been a calming and positive influence in my life. It has given me the opportunity to communicate with others who have the same feelings. This helps abate the frustrating loneliness and suffering same-sex attractions bring.

As I look back over my life, I keep getting the image of my being wrapped in chains. My suffering was silent. How could people understand that I had something inside of me that I hated? I despised being sexually attracted to men, especially my own peers. In reality, I was searching for masculinity not for sex. The chains of homosexuality kept me miserable. I wanted to be listened to, to be hugged, to be understood. I wanted to be the man that God had made me to be.

Five years ago, I felt so alone. I felt that no one would listen to my heart crying, that no one would really care. I desired to take my own life. In my search for peace, through the help of a close friend, I went to Mass for the first time in my life and felt God’s love envelop me. He guided me to Rome, where the Church’s teachings on homosexuality gave me great comfort. God, through His Church, cared for me, loved me, held me, and listened to me. By way of complicated events, I discovered Courage. Finally, I had arrived at a place where others could relate to me, a place where I could foster chaste friendships with other men who truly cared. We were not afraid to proclaim the truth that in Christ’s loving plan for us we could live a life of holiness and carry the cross after the One who died for us. This became a life of chaste holiness – to be the saints that God has called us to be. As members of Courage, we struggle together, and the Holy Spirit breaks the chains of homosexuality to free us to be who God calls us to be. Only then are we truly free.

For thirty years I suffered with same-sex attractions. I married thinking this would end the problem, but it didn’t. For ten years, I led a double life – husband and father by day and homosexual affairs at night. I learned about Courage from a friend. I attended my first conference in 1993 and discovered a world I had never known existed, a world of honesty, understanding, and support from people who knew where I was coming from. I also found forgiveness, both sacramental and personal. Courage brought hope through a plan for healing and growth drawn from the teachings of the Church, coupled with the wisdom of expert writers in the field of homosexuality.

Courage is the Church at its best, ministering the truth with compassion and fidelity. Through Courage I have come to know God better and to have a deeper understanding of God’s love for me. I accept fully that it is possible with God’s help to live a chaste life. Courage is a major element in my life today, in my battle to save my immortal soul. The Courage apostolate’s strict adherence to the teachings of the Catholic Church enabled me to love my Church more.

Over the five years of my involvement with Courage, this ministry has become an instrument of God’s grace in my life. I’m thankful for Courage’s fidelity to the “tough love” of the Gospel, for its balanced and informed approach to homosexual issues, for its refusal to bypass Good Friday on the road to Easter.

Because my Archdiocese no longer supports the local Courage Chapter, most of my participation in this movement has been “from a distance.” Through the annual conferences, Courage remains for me a light in the darkness, a sign of contradiction but also, a sign of hope. May Our Lord continue to bless this apostolate and its work in the lives of many. I lived a quarter of a century absorbed in the gay lifestyle. I thought I was leading a wholesome Christian life. However, I was actually living my life my way, not Christ’s way.

# COURAGE WOMEN

## #9 A PERSONAL REFLECTION

If there's one thing I've come to appreciate in the last couple of years, it's the peaceful presence of the Holy Spirit and the awareness that God is with me, guiding me through each day. I think I've come to deeply appreciate that peace because I know what it's like to live without it.

Several years ago, I was in deep distress. I realized I had to face up to the fact that I was struggling with same-sex attractions. The emotional issues, the underlying pain, and the desire for affection were building up inside me. I desperately wanted to connect with another woman who understood me. I soon came very close to falling into an immoral relationship with a female friend.

Even though we didn't become physically involved, I still went through great emotional pain when that relationship ended. I felt deep rejection. I was angry with myself for ever having flirted with the idea in the first place, and angry with God for not allowing me to pursue such a relationship. My peace was gone.

The emotional hurt lasted for a couple of years. There were sleepless nights and a recurring battle between the desires of the flesh and the promptings of the Spirit. It didn't make sense. Why was I experiencing so much pain over someone I hardly knew? How could I have "fallen in love" with someone who seemed to have no trouble walking away from me? The answer is one I'm only now willing to admit. Our "relationship" was more about fantasy than reality.

The pain I experienced was also an indication that there were much deeper issues needing attention: insecurity about my femininity, conflict over my gender identity, deep feelings of inferiority, fear and mistrust of the opposite sex, addiction to fantasy and masturbation, and above all, a genuine and legitimate need for warmth, affection, and reassurance. These issues take a long

time to work through.

My healing isn't complete. Four years later, I've come a long way emotionally, but I still have a way to go. I thank God that I'm now in a better place psychologically and spiritually than I was before.

I want complete resolution of past events, especially the healing of relationships and those memories that make me feel ashamed. But I'm learning to trust in God's timing. Through experience I have learned that when it comes to psychological and emotional things, God works on us slowly, layer by layer.

Spiritually speaking, God has given me many helps along the way: the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary, the Mass, the intercession of the Saints, and the fellowship and support of others with similar difficulties who also want to be faithful to the Catholic Church. My brothers and sisters at Courage are a second family to me, a sign that God never leaves us alone in our struggles and in our pain.

I thank God that peace has slowly returned to my life, and with it, joy and laughter. Amen.

by Elena

## #10 A COURAGE REPARATIONAL GROUP

The Holy Spirit urged me to start a reparational group within the Courage movement. Since my earliest days as a Courage member (1982), I have believed there is a vocational aspect to Courage. By this I mean a way or means to grow in the interior life by surrendering our particular homo-emotional affliction and uniting our sufferings with Our Lord's Passion on the Cross.

In the 1980's we in the Courage movement fought on the front lines. We encountered all the political "gay" systems which arose to confront us, for example, the "gay rights" movement, Phil Donahue, New Ways Ministry, and Dignity International. Sadly, we sometimes had to oppose even our own priests and religious when defending chastity. Evil is raging on so many fronts, and only prayer and fasting can combat and subdue it. God is raising His own army of servants to stand in faith and offer ourselves sacrificially as victim souls. Hence, the need for the Courage Reparational group.

It started at a first anniversary Mass for Courage in Philadelphia in 1988. As a Courage member was reading excerpts from St. Agnes, declaring Jesus as her only Lover, the words of Isaiah 62:4 came to me: "No longer are you to be named "forsaken," nor your land "abandoned," but you shall be called "my delight" and your land "the wedded." Immediately I felt God's desire to unite our particular suffering for the conversion and healing of others with homo-emotional struggles.

It doesn't take a multitude; just a few to stand in for the multitude (like Abraham in Genesis 18). The number of persons with homo-emotional issues who are being deceived by contemporary society, by political systems, and, alas, even sometimes by our own Catholic consecrated religious who, for whatever reason, have been led astray and are in their own rebellion against the Magisterium of our Church, are causing many to abandon the truth for the lie propagated by the Evil One. The lie is that we all need sex to be totally integrated" and that "sex has power we can't live without." The real truth is that chastity

brings true integration of oneself with God. Chastity is the real power!

In a private meeting with Cardinal O'Connor on September 8, 1992, the Courage Reparational group was born and, through the Cardinal's approval, allowed to grow. For the last several years "a few" have gathered regularly, once a month, to pray a holy hour for the multitudes. We renew our commitment every November 21st, which is our anniversary date, aligned with Mary's feast day, The Presentation in the Temple. We make a holy hour every Friday and unite our wounds with His wounds on His day of passion and reparation. We implore Our Lady's intercession through the Rosary at the beginning of our holy hour, and we end with the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, imploring God's mercy for all who suffer homo-emotionally.

The Courage Reparational group has great hope and confidence. We believe that God will transform us and make us holy through our weaknesses, so we may give glory to the Father and stand as a witness to the world that God is not ashamed of those who find themselves with homo-emotional feelings and desires. On the contrary, He sees in our "wound" an opportunity for great grace and deep intimacy with Jesus, our only real Lover.

The twenty-first century is bringing in the multitudes through our silence, prayer, and witness. Yes, there was a time to fight on the front lines, but now it is time to fight in silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

by Vera

## #11 WE MISS YOU

I started acting on my attraction towards other women shortly after I completed college. I started going to gay bars and gay/lesbian AA meetings. What a combo!

I was first involved with an older woman who had a teenage son. I thought I was deeply in love, but in hindsight, I would have to say I was completely co-dependent. Several times she ended the relationship out of concern for the effect the relationship was having on her son. I was heartbroken at those times, but in foolish attempts to prove I could go on with my life, I would go to the bars and get involved in several short-term relationships. One time, however, I met a woman who was in an on again/off again relationship. I thought I was in love with her also, but that relationship ended when she returned to her first. So I was again back at the bars.

I was raised Catholic, attended Catholic school, and have a sister who is a nun, but my wandering from the faith began when I was in college. I started to act on my same-sex attractions and went on a full-scale run away from the Church.

I have been in recovery from alcoholism since I was in college. I leapt at the "God as you understand Him" concept as an excuse to write my own rules about what was moral and what was not. My prayer life (which was minimal) was more centered on telling God what I wanted, rather than surrendering my will to His. It truly is a miracle that I stayed sober. I guess I take that as a sign that God's love continues to reach out even when we choose to run away from Him.

I thought that I might have better luck finding "true love" if I moved to a larger area. Thus, I moved from my small town to the big city. I got involved in a relationship with a woman I had met through a gay AA meeting. I can't really claim that I had deep feelings for her. Over time I found out she was having a relationship with a woman she'd met in an on-line chat room. Several of her "business trips" to California were to meet her.

I wasn't feeling too depressed about that relationship, but I did start to question the issue of relationships and life in general.

I was living a block away from the Cathedral in the city. Architecturally it really is an inspiring building. I wanted to go in, but I didn't think I had a right. Finally, when a flower show which was open to the public was announced, I went. I began to go in the mornings during my walks too – just to think – and pretty soon my thinking focused on the beautiful, large crucifix. It had been a long time since I had thought about Jesus, His death, and resurrection. My understanding of God had taken on some vague "God is good" outlook. Now I found myself asking the questions: "Is Jesus real? Why did he have to die?"

About that same time, our Archdiocese was hosting a "We Miss You" program for lapsed Catholics. I thought about going, but I couldn't quite make up my mind. Then, as I listened to the radio one morning, I heard a report on the results of a Gallup poll and the percentage of Catholics who believe Church teaching only on certain issues. I can't remember what the numbers were, but it was enough to make me think, "Well, maybe the Church is more open-minded. Maybe I can come back."

I called the "We Miss You" program and also started attending Sunday Mass. Soon I found myself drawn to daily Mass. I felt so much peace there. It was a new kind of joy. God was real and He loved me.

I still thought I could live my lesbian/feminist lifestyle, but found myself waking up at three in the morning, questioning it. Finally, after too many sleep-disturbed nights, I got up and started walking and praying. I had the idea that I would not stop until God and I had this worked out. After some time I made a deal with God. I would not go to the bars or in any other way act out on my attraction towards women for six months. He would have to show me that it was possible, without my going crazy.

First, I called the Family Life Office for help. They had no resources and told me to call the Chancery. They directed me to a religious brother. Upon our meeting he said, "The Church is wrong about a lot of things, and it's probably wrong about this. I'll see you down at the bars." Frankly, I was floored. I was not committed yet to this idea of chastity, but I at least wanted to hear the Church's side.

A few days later, I picked up a magazine at the back of Church that had a question/answer column. It referred one of the enquirers to Courage. I called and talked to Fr. Harvey, and he sent some materials. I also got some information from Exodus and bought a copy of *Out of Egypt* by Jeanette Howard.

About that same time, my job transferred me to a town outside the city. This town had a very small Catholic Church. It was a great way to experience parish life at its best. I had three years to re-establish my faith. There were fewer temptations. I got involved with a charismatic prayer group and found some friends through that.

I can't describe the relief I felt after going to confession and all the graces that the Holy Spirit poured into my heart and soul that day. I continue to attend the Courage meetings and go out to lunch with the guys after the meeting. We also get together for social events. It's been a real blessing for me to be with the group. The guys have helped me to re-learn my Catholic faith and how to have a fuller spiritual life, one that includes much prayer, the Rosary, reading of the Bible, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, spiritual reading, and attendance at Mass every Sunday and holy days.

In October, I attended my first Courage Women's Retreat. I recommend that all new women of Courage try to attend the annual women's retreat. The commitment of the women to love and worship Jesus Christ and live chaste lives is a great source of inspiration. The opportunity to pray and worship together along with shared meals, walks, talks, and laughs is reaffirming.

**(Note:** As of Advent 2012, there has not been a women's retreat in a few years, but we hope to

schedule one in the near future.)

Please keep me in your prayers and let's keep supporting each other as we work to live out chaste Christian lives that offer glory and praise to Jesus Christ, our merciful Lord and Savior. Hallelujah!

## #12 CATHY'S STORY

Six years ago, I was living what I thought was a good life. I owned a home with my same-sex partner, and together we were raising my two children from a previous marriage. I accepted myself as a person with same-sex attractions, and I truly felt there was nothing wrong with having a same-sex relationship, at least not until the Lord began to speak to my heart. He sent His Mother first.

In January of 1996, I lost my sister to multiple sclerosis. I too have M.S. However, at the time of my sister's death, I was managing okay. My sister's death really hit me hard, and three months later major problems with my M.S. crept back into my life causing me to become partially paralyzed. During the next several months I was homebound and became depressed. I began to cry out to God for an answer to suffering, death, and eternal life. This is when Our Lord sent me His Mother.

I thought I was going crazy because I began to feel the Blessed Mother whispering in my very soul. This I thought was really crazy because I had never before felt close to the Blessed Mother. Yet there she was, and I knew she was calling me back into the Church. I don't know how I knew it was the Blessed Mother, but I just did. I even told her I didn't feel close to her, that I felt closer to her Son Jesus. I felt this way because I had always thought of her as this perfect woman and mother who was unapproachable. Ever so gently she kept speaking to my heart. I finally gave up and quit fighting her and asked her to reveal to me who she really was. I suppose that was an invitation for her to really come into my heart.

WOW! What she revealed about herself was so different from my perception of her! She revealed her true perfection -- that she is perfect compassion, understanding, joy, peace, and love! I began to feel a joy and peace in my heart that I never knew existed. I began to feel I was being led back to Mass, so I began going to daily Mass. I loved it! Years before, I had gone out of

obligation, but now I found myself actually craving the Mass and most importantly, Our Lord in the Eucharist! I also felt the very gentle hand of Our Blessed Mother and Our Lord leading me into a desire to live a chaste life. Now I really thought I was going crazy! How was I ever going to do that? I would lose everything if I listened to that calling.

But the calling was too strong, and I knew I could no longer keep this new peace and joy unless I listened to my heart and lived a chaste life. The decision for chastity wasn't as difficult as I once imagined because I already had that desire. However, the fact that I could lose everything by making this choice scared me immensely. Ironically, even though my life did change, it was this change that brought me into a deeper trust in Jesus' love.

I have since sold my house and moved into an apartment. I am still good friends with my ex-"partner," even though it was hard at first. I have grown in my relationship with Christ and still possess that wonderful peace and joy! I am actually happier now than I have ever been before.

At first my children did not understand all the changes I was going through, but Jesus took care of that situation, and they are now both good practicing Catholics. Our Lord has also shown me what true love is, a love that I had never known before. I can never go back to the way I was living before my conversion. To do so would be to deny the truth. And the truth has truly set me free – free to love with God's love, a holy love. I know my life is forever changed, and it hasn't been easy. However, I have found a precious pearl, one that is so awesome and beautiful that I would sell everything else in order to keep it!

Before this experience I did not realize how deeply in bondage I was. Praise Jesus for His mercy, because now I feel free! I think I had some signs along the way about the consequences of living the "gay" lifestyle, but I chose

to ignore them when an uncomfortable thought came to mind. I guess Our Lord sends His Mother to some people first (the difficult cases). The Blessed Mother stayed very strong in my life for about a year and then led me in her gentle loving way into the heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ. She "courts a soul," then cleans it up and presents it to her son Jesus! I have a strong devotion to "The Immaculate Heart of Mary" and to "The Sacred Heart of Jesus," because I experienced what this devotion truly is. It is the love of Jesus through the love of His Blessed Mother, and we are led into loving Jesus ever more deeply!

Although I don't have a Courage group in my area, I do keep in touch with some Courage members through e-mail and by phone. I'm grateful for their support. I wish there was a strong Courage fellowship in my area. While I still struggle and sometimes fall, I have no regrets about my decision for chastity because Jesus and His Blessed Mother have changed my life forever. God continues to guide me, one day at a time.

I have found that the rewards of chastity far outweigh the moments of desire. I have found myself weakest to temptation when I allow my prayer life to weaken. Satan likes nothing better than to convince us that since we are only human, it is okay to engage in sinful activity to meet our human needs. Satan likes nothing worse than to find us on our knees in humility and lifted up into the mercy of Jesus' love through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

I am now doing very well with the M.S. In fact, most people can't even tell I have M.S. unless I tell them. At one time, a physical healing was the most important desire I had. I am no longer afraid of suffering, or even of death. Our Lord and Blessed Mother have shown me a glimpse of the joy and peace of heaven, and the only thing I fear now is not living eternally in that joy, peace, and love of God and neighbor!

## #13 MY “MAGNIFICAT OF PRAISE”

My testimony is my “Magnificat of Praise” for all the Lord has done for me, holy is His Name. I am the second oldest of four children and the only daughter of Irish immigrant parents. My family was somewhat religious, and I attended 16 years of Catholic schools, including an all-girls’ high school and a college of mostly women.

My Dad was an alcoholic; he did his best but had a temper and was sometimes rough with my brothers. I cannot remember seeing any affection between my parents, and the times my Dad told me that he loved me, he was drunk.

My family history had a big impact on my emotions. I learned not to feel and not to talk about my feelings. I ended up feeling different and separate from others, and I had to unlearn those patterns for true emotional growth to take place. In my early years I played almost exclusively with boys (my brothers and neighbors), as there were few girls around.

I remember that as a child I never dreamed about future marriage or children and, as a teen, I felt disconnected to other girls.

As I grew, I experienced attractions and crushes on boys my age, but I also experienced rejection, hurtful teasing, and vile come-ons from males. I learned to feel afraid of them. There is also a vague fearfulness that seemed to be linked to a blocked-out memory of possible abuse.

When learning about family alcoholism, I heard the statistic that daughters of alcoholics marry alcoholics. I remember exactly when and where I was when I vowed that this would not happen to me. Years later, in *Courage*, I learned that this “unconscious vow” helped explain the development of my SSA feelings.

Since I was a spiritual kid, it is fortunate that my family attended church and prayed at home. I began attending my parish charismatic prayer group at age 15. God used this movement to begin healing me of fears and shyness, to open me

to receive affection, and to learn how to share with others. Most importantly, I came to know Jesus in a deeper way and began to serve Him.

After about ten years in prayer meetings, God led me to start dealing with my family alcoholism issues through a twelve-step group. I became familiar with the twelve steps and began learning how to take care of and share my feelings. I learned the basic skills of living life on its own terms, especially learning how to forgive.

I began to be more aware of my SSA feelings in my late teens, but I still tried to deny this, designating it a “normal phase.” In college I noticed I had “radar” about who might be “gay.” I had gay friends who told me I was gay but I just didn’t know it yet.

I never acted on my SSA feelings, nor did I date men. I often felt like I was in a sexual no-man’s land.

At age 30, my SSA feelings became much stronger. I developed emotional dependencies on some female friends and went through strong grief reactions when these ended.

While at twelve-step meetings, lesbians shared more openly with me than with others. They seemed to sense that I was on their wavelength.

At this point, a coworker who knew about my same-sex attractions went into a lesbian relationship herself. This upset me. My boss moved me to the desk next to hers and this complicated things immensely! I have come to see events like this as God’s sense of humor (on the days when I’m not seeing them as attacks by the Evil One!).

I was subjected to her daily hot phone calls to her lover about wardrobe and evening activities. It was really making me crazy, so I took a very important step. Homosexuality was being mentioned everywhere in the media and in my life, so I decided to let God work in this area of my life. I gave Him permission to deal with this secret

area that I barely acknowledged to myself, let alone to Him.

All heaven broke loose! Everywhere I went I kept hearing and seeing the word “Courage.” Finally I read an article about the organization and wrote a letter to the national office. I received a package of materials and read them before going to sleep at night. I received great consolation and peace when I did this.

The upcoming conference was in the Bronx that year, and I was afraid to go. Every time I pondered whether or not to go to the Courage conference a song came on that I heard at no other time. It spoke to me so strongly that I knew God wanted me to be there. The song *You’ll Never Know* by Rachel Rachel told of a journey that promised healing and real self-knowledge if only I would take the risk and walk through my fears.

It was so moving to see God working to bring me to that conference and into the heart of Courage. I decided to obey God and attend. I got the “courage” to go to Courage. At that first conference I met others who struggled like me, and I finally felt home. I began attending meetings in NYC where I was the “token girl” for awhile.

I felt warmly welcomed by my new brothers and began making friends. I looked at the twelve-steps in a new way, humbly and deeply realizing my need for a Savior. Later, I began meeting with other female members, and we restarted a women’s group. Through Courage, I have learned the importance of service to others.

When I first came to Courage, I was not seeking orientation change, and it was assumed that after a certain age this was not likely. But I was happy to have group support for my single chaste life. I began to socialize with members and build closer friendships. The SSA feelings became manageable.

I began to seek prayer for inner healing and started investigating the roots, or possible roots, of my SSA. At the advice of one of the EnCourage members, I started spending time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. I remember simply sitting and saying, “Okay Lord, I am here for my

radiation treatment.” I was bringing memories and past events to Jesus and going through a process of forgiveness and letting go.

Somewhere along the way I was very surprised when I noticed feelings of attraction for one of the male members with whom I had become close friends. While I still experienced SSA feelings for some time, eventually my SSA feelings faded and have not returned.

This male friend and I dated for two years. Strangely, becoming close with a man did not feel foreign and strange. In this friendship I learned to be more human and vulnerable, and I saw how controlling I could be. It was the first time in my life that I dreamed of marriage and children.

There were many ups and downs, and after two years we broke up. He is still my closest friend. I did, however, go through a very long period of grief and depression as a result of the breakup. Growing up I had never thought I would get married, so I gravitated toward being a single woman who would live for the Lord. Now, however, dating had given me new hope for marriage, even if only temporarily.

It took me a long time to return to understanding God’s call for my life. Now I feel free from that loss and see myself as happy to use my single freedom to serve God. I feel a call to serve the Lord in Courage. I’m not sure what the future holds, but I know Him who holds my future, and He is trustworthy.

I’m grateful to Courage and EnCourage for gracing me on this path with the tools to live a chaste, happy life.

More than anything else received, my greatest blessing is knowing how much I need God and his people. I am not alone anymore!

## #14 KATHY (FROM CONFERENCE)

Hi. My name is Kathy and it is a gift from God to be here tonight to share my witness. I'm just going to tell you how I was as a youngster growing up. I am not going to go into details, but I am going to try to give you a little of my background and hopefully, I might be able to touch people's hearts, especially those that are new.

I'm from Philadelphia. I'm the oldest of three. As I was growing up, I felt different from most of my friends. I felt like I didn't belong in my family. I felt alone at times.

As a youngster I never wanted to dress like a girl. I wanted to dress like a man. I always thought that men were more beautiful models than women. Men could do this and could do that, and they could get away with it. Whereas, to me, women were sissies. [laughter] I related better to men.

As mentioned, growing up I didn't want to wear women's clothes. I wanted to wear slacks all the time. Also, I used to play sports with the men. My girlfriend and I were the only two who played with the men – football, baseball – you name it, we played it.

I was a tomboy. I climbed on rooftops, trees -- everything.

My mother took me to a psychologist – a school psychologist as a matter of fact. I was classified as slow. Naturally when the school psychologist classifies a student as slow, what happens? People think you're retarded.

In school my grades weren't good, usually failing or almost failing. I only earned an "A" in two subjects: Music and Gym. Music because I love to sing, and Gym because I could hop over those horses, hang on those rings, and climb those ropes. [laughter]

My mother was a strict Baptist. She went to church every weekend. We were raised with morals, therefore she often said that if we didn't

go to church, we would go to hell. If we cursed, we would go to hell. If we drank, we would go to hell. In other words, we had to be perfect in this world. [laughter] At least that's what I thought at that time. Thus, I pleased my mother and went to church every weekend. (I wasn't Catholic then. I became a Catholic about 30 something years ago.) [laughter and applause]

I always had God in my life, though. I was taught that if a person was sick or dying or needed help, I should pray to Jesus and He will help. At that time so many people that I knew were dying, and I used to pray and pray and pray. Yet, they all died. I didn't understand why. Where was this God who was supposed to save the people I loved?

At the age of 16 something drastic happened. I began having sexual feelings, but the feelings I had were toward women.

I had never dated boys. I didn't have a desire to date them. My friends did, but I didn't. As it was getting more and more tempting to be with a woman, I believe that God foiled my plans. I didn't act out on those feelings. Thank God I had morals and knew that if I had sex outside of marriage – with a man or with a woman – it was a sin. I always say that Jesus spoiled the plans I had for acting out.

I picked up my first drink at the age of 18, and I drank because of my homosexual feelings. I had many excuses to drink, but I didn't have any excuse to stop. I loved it. I loved it because when I drank, I had the courage to talk to people. I had always been a shy person. As a matter of fact, I used to have a stammering problem. That's why people made fun of me in school. They called me "holy roller," when all I wanted was to be left alone. They said I was slow and laughed at me, and they also used to ask, why don't you drink? The truth is, I didn't drink yet, but when I did start, I loved it because it helped repress my homosexual feelings. I repressed them a lot when I drank.

I came into AA in 1973. I am 22 years sober now. [applause] Despite sobriety, I continued having sexual fantasies about women, and I was afraid. I knew what that meant. It meant lesbian. I even had sexual fantasies about my AA sponsor.

I also met a man in AA whom I thought I loved. I married him. To this day I believe the reason I got married was because people were talking about me. "What? You're 30 years old and not married?" So naturally, what happened? I married to cover up how I felt.

I thought I loved him, and I didn't believe in divorce. Never. I had been told by my mother that whenever and wherever you make your bed, you lay in it. (My mother was strict in that, and I believe it today.) I was the codependent type, and I think I needed a father figure at that time. One day, however, I just got fed up with it, and I left my husband. He didn't want to work anymore. When he wanted to work, he would go in and when he didn't want to work, he wouldn't go in. Meanwhile, the sexual fantasies about women continued.

I met a woman in AA named Bernie, and the funny thing is, I fell in love with her. We didn't go far sexually, but we kissed at times. That's the first time I felt a very beautiful love with my own sex. I felt more with this woman than with my husband.

So, I came out of the closet. Yes, I am a lesbian, I finally admitted.

Before my divorce, Bernie happened to call me one night while my husband was home. We had two phones, one downstairs and one upstairs. This particular night I said to Bernie, "I love you a lot," never thinking that my husband might be on the other line. I don't know if he heard. I don't know to this day. He never approached me, but I came down the steps and he didn't say anything.

When I did leave him, the first thing he said to me was, "What am I going to do without your check?" My paycheck! Not me, my paycheck!

I prayed about it a long time before I left him, and I thought Jesus answered my prayers. (I always

discern in prayer.) My girlfriend said, "OK, you left your husband; I'm leaving mine. My house is open to you." I said, "Praise the Lord." [laughter]

Strange thing was that when I left my husband, Bernie's house was open to me. But come to find out, she was going down to Jersey on weekends to meet someone else. I said, "Hey what's this?" She had never told her husband to leave! I was living in the house with her husband and she was down in Jersey. I said, "Wait a minute, this plan is really messed up." [laughter]

I met one of Bernie's friends, Vikki, and started telling everyone to watch it, Vikki is a lesbian. Not me. [laughter] Vikki is a lesbian. And here I was getting all jealous. One night, Vikki and I were fighting over Bernie. Not fist fighting, thank God, but we were dominating. That was the first time I experienced jealousy over another woman.

My husband had been the type that if he met a girl, I didn't feel jealous. I didn't love him. I liked him as a friend. But after six months of living with Bernie, even though we were not having sex, only kissing, I was filled with jealousy.

At that point Bernie moved to California and asked me politely to leave the house. I said, "Why? I thought our plans were to be together." She said, "No way. I'm moving to California. Where are you going?" I cried for the simple reason that until Bernie, I had never felt another woman's love. I cried the whole week, or almost the whole week.

I went to my sister's house, bag and baggage and said, "Hey Sis, let me into your apartment to live," and she did. The funny thing is, she wanted me out, too. You know why? Because I kept her chaste for a year and she didn't like it. [laughter] Thank God. I was a total pain.

Eventually, I did leave, and I did get my own apartment because I could afford it by then. I never had another love affair, believe me. But this woman Bernie did hurt my heart, despite not acting out.

It's strange. I just did my fourth step with my AA

sponsor. She's heterosexual. When I told her my fourth step, I didn't realize I was also writing on a piece of paper, "I am homosexual." (You don't necessarily tell your sponsor everything, but I did that night.) I said, "Yvonne, there's something I need to talk about." She said, "Yeah, I know." "What do you mean?" I asked. "You've had sexual attractions toward me, haven't you?" I felt so dirty. I really felt dirty. I said, "Who told you?" She said, "Kathy, when you left your husband, I saw another Kathy. I observed how you were walking. I watched how you are talking and acting."

That's how she knew. She said, "Kathy, you cannot hide anything from somebody who loves you." So I said to her husband, who is also in AA thirty-some years, "Tony, I am a lesbian." He said, "We have a thousand lesbians in AA, so don't worry about it." [laughter]

Tony and Yvonne accepted me for who I was. And these were heterosexual people. I didn't expect heterosexual friends to accept me, but they did.

A couple of months ago, my sponsor said to me, "Why didn't you ever act out on me?" I said, "I didn't act out on you because your husband would kill me, and I know Tony very well." [laughter]

My mother's in the hospital now. She's in ICU because her sugar went up to 500. So I've been off and on campus, running back and forth to the hospital all weekend. The interesting thing is, I told my mother I was going down to the shore. I didn't tell her I was speaking at the Courage conference. My sister called and told me to get back to the hospital because of an emergency. I decided it's about time for me to share with my mother what I am. Yes, I am a child of God, but I also have same-sex attractions. It's my condition. [applause] I said to my mother, "I've got something to tell you. I love you, but I am homosexual." She said, "Yeah, you're a lesbian." She started laughing! I said, "What's so funny?" She said, "I knew it all the time." [laughter] Mother's do, you know. It was like a big weight off my back.

Now it's in the open; I don't have to hide. Ever!

My sister thinks I did something wrong by telling my mother while she was in the hospital. I said to her, "God forbid, if she was going to die, she would've died yesterday." [laughter.] She's a very strong woman. And she believes in God. She must've been praying for me all these years.

I came into Courage three years ago, and I knew I needed spiritual guidance. I called Dr. Nace and asked for help. He said, "Well, there are no women in our group, but if you can relate to men, you might as well come." Every group I've belonged to were men's groups – no women. I don't mind sharing with them if they don't mind sharing with me. We're all the body of Christ, so we help each other out.

Since joining Courage, I'm whole again. Before Courage, I didn't feel that wholeness. I felt dirty. My feelings were over in the corner, body wise.

I go to therapy still, and I've been in therapy for five years -- a Christian therapist. She's a great help. She asked me to journal my feelings. I said, "What feelings? You mean my homosexual feelings?" She said, "Yes, why not? These feelings are part of you."

So now I know I don't have to drink any more. I don't have to hide who I am. I'm a child of God.

I often thought Jesus had abandoned me in life, but He didn't. I abandoned Him. There's lots of times that I could've killed myself, but Jesus was right there to save me. Like I said, my bout with Satan has ended. I feel healed. Don't get me wrong, I still have sexual fantasies, but not as much. And if I do, I offer them up to Jesus Christ, my Savior. [applause] He heals every part of me. I do go to Mass every day.

I love you guys. You guys have helped me a lot. Even though I don't know you, still you're here for me. We all help each other. We are all the Body of Christ. When one member hurts, the other members hurt, too.

When I'm hurting, I pray the Stations of the Cross. And when I see Jesus on the cross, I see myself on the cross. I'm not saying my life is

peaches today, but I manage not to act out. If I'm sad, I always say, "Well Jesus, you came on this earth. You were sad, too, when Lazarus died." He knows what I'm talking about.

I want to thank all of you for having me here tonight. If I were still acting out, I wouldn't be here, so I want to thank Jesus, too, for bringing me here. [applause]

## #15 RICHARD (FROM CONFERENCE)

I'm so excited to be here tonight. I'm shaking. I want to thank Fr. Harvey, Fr. Randall, Our Blessed Lady, and Our Blessed Lord for bringing me here.

My story begins around the sixth grade at a Catholic grammar school. I started noticing boys at the same time that the girls in my class were noticing boys. It seemed very normal and natural for me, and I found myself fantasizing about certain boys that I found attractive, and even thinking about dating them or going to the school dance with them.

In seventh and eighth grade I was still doing the same thing, because it still seemed normal and natural for me. It didn't feel like there was anything wrong with it.

When I got into high school and found out that acting on such behavior was wrong and was not approved by the Church, I realized I could never act on it if I wanted to stay in God's graces. I said, "Well maybe I should find myself a girlfriend and just do what other guys do in high school -- start dating." So I did.

It was okay. I dated several young ladies, but during the time that I was dating these girls, my same-sex attractions got stronger and stronger. I started to want to subconsciously act upon them, and I knew that I couldn't. As my libido started to go into overdrive – around my sophomore and junior year – it became harder and harder to say no to this urge. Finally, I found myself in my senior year beginning to engage in homosexual activity, while still dating females to keep up appearances.

I remember going to my senior prom and saying goodbye to my boyfriend a few hours before I picked up my date for that night. I was leading a terrible double life, and starting to resent God in a really big way.

My parents even took me to doctors when I was really young because they could see that I was

not like my brother, that my mannerisms were not the same. I was effeminate. I didn't like sports. I liked playing with girl things. So they took me to physicians to see if there was something they could do to correct this. I didn't seem to be developing normally.

Midway into my 20s, I said, "Well, I really can't stop this homosexual activity thing." But my religious upbringing and background started to come back into my head. My parents were praying for me a lot. And I said, "Maybe it's not really God's fault after all. Maybe I should just stop analyzing why I'm this way and why I feel this way and give God a second chance. So what I'll do is compromise – the language of love. I'll find a male companion that I will see exclusively and we will go to church together. Of course we won't be able to go to Communion. But it will look very respectable, and we can give to church charities, go to church functions, and although it's not 100% of what God wants, it's halfway there. So that can't be too bad. I mean, compromise is the language of love."

So I found a relationship like that, and it lasted maybe for about a year. Then it ended. I don't remember why, but after it did, I decided it had been a pretty good experience. I decided to give God another chance. [laughter] I found myself another Catholic boyfriend who liked to go to church, and I gave God another chance because God was pretty nice about it.

After we were together for about a year, he decided he wanted to go to college, in Kingston. This meant he was away at least five days out of the week, but back on weekends so we could go to church. [laughter]

After he started going to college, I found that during the week – I don't know if I was getting lonely or bored or feeling sorry for myself or depressed or maybe all of those things – I started to cheat on him. I didn't want to get involved with another person because he might not have wanted to go to church. [laughter] So I went to one of those

places that gay guys go when they don't want to get involved, where they just want to get satisfied. We all know what places I'm talking about – bath houses, bookstores, and places of that sort.

I started to frequent those places a couple times a week. They were fast, efficient. [laughter] I never even got first names. That way I didn't have to worry about anything developing.

I would come home and feel pretty lousy about myself, about what I had done. But I told myself it's just a physical thing and it's sort of taking care of my needs in between seeing my friend, and nobody will get hurt. As long as he doesn't know about it, what's the problem? That went on for maybe a year and a half.

Finally, we broke up. Actually, I broke up the relationship because I was often feeling depressed. I said to myself, "You're sad; you need something to pick up your spirits. Go to one of those places and have sex. You'll be fine."

If I had a really bad week at work and I was tired, or whenever I felt that life was dealing me a really dirty deal, I found that if I went to one of those places and had sex, I'd feel better. So sex became my cure-all for whatever ailed me.

If I was happy, I would celebrate and have sex. If I was sad, I would pick myself up and celebrate and have sex. Little did I know what was really happening to me when I was doing this. Slowly, very slowly, without my realizing it, I was becoming a sex addict.

I kept telling myself it's not really a problem. The problem is, I just don't want to get involved with anyone in a serious relationship. This is just a convenience thing for me right now. I believed I could walk away from it any time I wanted.

And so I continued. I continued going to those places – the bookstores, the bath houses, the movie theaters. It got to the point where I frequented certain places so much I started working in one of them part-time. [laughter]

I thought this was really great because I got to meet the best as soon as they walked in. Why

did I ever want a relationship? This was wonderful.

While working at one place, I got introduced to pornography. I had never seen pornography before – except maybe in a book or something. But this place played pornographic films on the premises, and I'll never forget the first night I saw it. I couldn't believe this was such an erotic place. It was incredible.

I continued to work there for a while and started to indulge in a lot of pornography. In fact, I got to the point where I couldn't do anything with anyone unless there was pornography playing on a monitor nearby, or unless pornographic magazines were strewn around the floor. I kept saying these things were just visual aids. I really didn't think I was addicted to this stuff.

But without my realizing it, or without my wanting to admit it, I was becoming addicted to pornography, as well as to the sexual activity, the non-intimate sexual activity.

I started having a lot of sexual partners, many sexual partners. Some nights I had seven, eight, nine, mixing this with pornography. And that started to bother me. It started to bother my conscience.

It just didn't seem normal to be doing this five nights a week. So I started using recreational drugs, and I didn't have to worry about my conscience anymore. It no longer bothered me. The drugs made it all okay.

The use of recreational drugs went on for quite a while. It got to the point that when I went with someone, I couldn't have sex with him unless there were recreational drugs, pornography, and a sleazy atmosphere. But I'm not really hooked on this stuff, I continued to tell myself. [laughter] It's just a convenience for me because I don't have time to get into a long-term relationship. This is why I'm doing it, but I can walk away from this anytime I want.

I was wrong. I couldn't walk away. As my addiction to pornography grew – this is so hard to say – I got another job and I started working in the

adult pornographic industry. That was a big, big move.

At first I told myself, I'll just do magazines. That's low-key. That's low risk. I'm by myself. Nobody's getting hurt. I'm not going to catch any diseases. It'll satisfy this need I have.

Well, I didn't really say it like that because I didn't think I had a problem. I thought I'd be able to indulge in pornography and nobody would get hurt. I certainly wouldn't get hurt. It's just an innocent thing.

So for a while I did magazines, posters, some greeting cards. But it wasn't long before I was invited to do my first pornographic film. Oh no, I can't do that, I told myself. I can't do that. I might catch AIDS! And two weeks later I was on the set doing it, and not even caring about whether or not I'd get AIDS.

It was just so exciting, titillating. I think we made a movie in one day, and I probably had such a good time doing it, I forgot to stop for my paycheck. It was just unbelievable that anyone would want to pay you for doing something like this.

Through this whole scenario of getting involved in the porn industry, I could always feel the presence – and this is going to sound really strange – the presence of God right in back of me. I had this mother who was a powerhouse of prayer saying the Rosary every day for me, and I could always feel and see God in the background. Like the hound of heaven.

I kept saying, “Lord, why are you following me like this? What do you want from me? I tried it your way. I can't do it. I just can't do it. I'm just too weak. It's not possible.”

My sexual addiction continued. It got worse. Once I found myself doing a film that had a Satanic theme. And I couldn't believe what I was doing. I was like a heroin addict who needs his next fix. I couldn't stop myself.

I found myself immersed in this huge Satanic circle, and I just could not turn back. I did things

from Eucharistic desecration to scenes with animals. It just got to the point where I had to ask myself where it was going to stop? “God, where's it going to stop? Human sacrifice or something like that?”

I had a nervous breakdown. I got really sick. And I remember being very suicidal. I couldn't believe the way my life had gone and what I had done with my life. I began asking things like why God had put me on this earth? And I got a Baltimore Catechism answer in my head. “I put you on this earth to know me, love me, and serve me in this life, and be happy with me forever in the next.” I thought, “I can't do that. I can't do that.”

Here I was on my way to hell, both feet in the hellfire, and I remember reading a book by St. Louis de Montfort. In it he said that even a person falling into hell who calls on the name of Mary would not go unaided. So I found this broken rosary and I picked it up and I looked up and I said, “Woman behold your son,” and I struggled to pray a Rosary. I didn't know how to say it anymore. I was saying it backwards. I couldn't remember the mysteries. But I went through it. It must have taken me a couple of hours, and slowly, very slowly, Mary began to heal me.

For the next four years Our Lady prepared me to come back to the Church. I hadn't been to confession in about 25 years. I didn't remember the last time I had been to Mass. She started preparing me to go back to Mass, and I went back to Mass regularly every Sunday. But I was still unable to go to confession. Can you all guess why?

So for four years I went to Mass. What's the use of this, I wondered? I can't go to communion. I'm not going to get any benefits out of this. Then I remembered how in Catholic school the nuns taught us about the value of making a Spiritual Communion. At first I told myself it's just some pious little practice and doesn't mean anything. It doesn't do anything. But I decided to give it a try, since I couldn't go to communion during Mass.

I said, “Lord, Lord, you know I really want to come back. Mary, your mother, is bringing me. But I can't go to confession now. I just can't do it now. It's in the future, though. I promise you I'm

not just throwing you some line. I want to get out of this whole lifestyle I've been living, this whole sewer of filth to which I've become addicted."

Our Lady helped me day by day by day. She cleaned me up. She got my head back on straight. And for the next four years I was totally chaste, no homosexual activity. [applause] No bath houses, no pornography. Nothing.

Yet, there was still one thing missing. I needed to go to confession. And also, after four years of doing it alone on my own, I started to get shaky. I didn't know how much longer I could manage this on my own because I just felt so isolated. There must be other homosexuals out there like myself who feel the same way I do, I thought. Maybe I could find them on the Internet, or maybe I could write a letter to the editor in my Catholic diocesan paper. (I didn't know anything about Courage ... yet.)

One day at work I picked up a local diocesan newspaper and there was an article about Courage and the Courage chapter in Providence, Rhode Island. Fr. Randall was the spiritual director. So I wrote to Fr. Randall and shortly after, he contacted me.

Then I went to Our Lady and told her the good news. "There's this Courage place and you can kick back for a little while [laughter] and they're going to kind of take over. Look, I promise you, I told you I would go to confession. I promise you I'll go to confession. I really, really will go to confession, but I've got to ask an extra special favor. I know this is a lot to ask, and I have no right to ask you for miracles because I'm a bum. I'll go to confession, I promise you. But you're going to have to do something for me. You're going to have to send a priest to me because I can't really walk into the St. Francis Chapel and say, 'Hello I'm an ex-Satanist porn star. [laughter] Could you give me absolution? I'm sorry for my sins!'" I didn't think that wasn't going to work.

So I said to Our Lady, "If you'll just send the priest to me, this will be my sign that this is the one with whom I will make my confession. I will

have a confession and everything will be fine."

Ironically, I didn't have a ride to that first Courage meeting, and Fr. Randall called to ask if I needed a ride. I'm like, "Yeah. Who's going to pick me up?"

"I'll pick you up." [laughter, applause]

So I looked up and I said, "Is this the one?" [laughter]

I remember the night of the first Courage meeting when he came to pick me up. It was a horrible rainy stormy night. You wouldn't even put a cat outside, it was so bad. I had been reading a book on Marian apparitions and miracles and it said that most of the time when Our Lady appeared, for example at Fatima or Lourdes, one of the things she used to test people's faith was rain, and very bad weather. [laughter]

I was standing out there with my umbrella and it was going inside out. [laughter] Then all of a sudden a car pulled up and I saw this Roman collar appearing through the raindrops. I looked up and asked again, "Is this really the one?" And I'm sure she was up there saying: Hello? [laughter] Aren't we pathetic?

I got in the car, and I remember the first words out of Fr. Randall's mouth. He said, "Richard, God loves homosexuals." [laughter] And I said, "He does? Really?"

As we were driving to the Courage meeting I said to Our Lady, "Is he really the one? Look, I think he's the one, but could you just give me another sign? [laughter] I may be sounding a little unreasonable here, but I have to be really sure because I don't want to have to revive this man halfway through my confession." [laughter]

I have great devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which developed in the four years that Mary was cleaning me up and getting me ready to come back to the Church in full union. And I remember speaking about the brown scapular at my first night at Courage and how it's such a great thing to wear because of the scapular promise that whoever dies wearing it shall not

suffer eternal fire. And I just feel so good when I wear this because I know Mary's guarantee -- her promise -- that saying the Rosary daily and wearing a scapular means you're not going to have to worry about perishing. I had just started talking about this when Father said, "Oh, I wear one." He whipped it out. [laughter] I won't ask for any more signs. [laughter]

A few weeks later, after 25 years, Fr. Randall heard my confession. I remember getting home that night and feeling so high. It was just like walking on marshmallows. I took my Crucifix off the wall and thought about the way I had lived and the way that I now planned on living. I said to myself, "If I ever give my love to another man again, it will have to be eternal." I asked Jesus to be my lover, and I asked Mary to be my mother, and since that day I have never ever walked alone. They're always with me, always by my side. [applause]

I realize now that God didn't make me homosexual. He didn't curse me or anything like that. I have been given a cross of chastity, and He expects me to carry it.

He is with me. Jesus is with me now. Jesus is my lover. Jesus is by my side. If I fall while carrying my cross, He's there to help me get back up and to keep walking towards Calvary.

He left us all a most perfect example of what to do if we fall or if we have a setback carrying our cross. He fell three times carrying His cross, and whether we fall three times or 30 million times, it's irrelevant, just as long as we get up after each fall. Amen. [applause]

So I have been in Courage going on two years, and Jesus is still my lover, and Mary is the best Mom in the world, and I'm still going strong. God love you all and thank you for listening to me. [applause]