

Marquand Chapel
April 3, 2006

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I became a teenager in the early 90's. The New Kids on the Block were on top of the charts, spandex and neon were all the rage, and (like most teenagers) I had a lot of questions about sex. I looked for answers all over the place- in teen magazines, on "Beverly Hills 90210," even in school. In fifth and sixth grade at my Lutheran elementary school, we watched a cartoon filmstrip about sex. It was only ten minutes long. I can sum it up in one sentence: "There's this thing called sex which God gave to married people so they can have babies." Not very informative. In tenth grade at my public high school, sex ed was part of health class. The teacher was also the football coach and I don't think our class was high on his priority list. He taught sex ed the same way he taught everything else: we silently read from the text book, then filled out a multiple choice worksheet. No discussion whatsoever. I got 100% on my worksheet and was named "MVP of the Day," but I still had a lot of unanswered questions.

The problem was that *my* questions weren't in the text book. Like, how will I know when I'm attracted to someone? Will anyone ever be attracted to me? Does God still love gay people? If its wrong to have sex before marriage, why do so many Christians do it? School books had no answers for questions like these.

I really wanted to talk to my mom or someone at church, but I didn't think I could. Nobody in my church ever talked about sex, nor did anyone in my family. Plenty of Christians talked about sex on TV, and they all said the same thing: sex outside of marriage is wrong, homosexuality is *really* wrong, and anyone who says otherwise is evil. That was also the message in the teen section of the Christian bookstore. A few of my friends tried talking to their Christian parents about sex, with disastrous results. Sara was kicked out of her house and excommunicated from her church for being gay. Katie got grounded for *six months* for just asking her mom about birth control. To my teenage self, the message was clear: unless I wanted trouble, I should keep my questions to myself.

With no adult guidance, I made some bad choices, faced some painful consequences, and dealt with all of it alone. I felt isolated from my church family and fearful of their judgment, so I just stopped going. It wasn't until college that I found real, comprehensive information about sexuality and people willing to discuss the tough questions. It took the better part of those four years to make peace with my teenage experiences. Once I had, I decided that I shouldn't let the ideas and judgments of some Christians keep me from my faith.

After college, I went back to my church, determined to learn what people there really believed about sexuality. I didn't find any answers in worship, so I tried a Bible study. Remarkably, the topic of homosexuality was raised my very first night in the class. To my great surprise, my own pastor called sexuality a gift, and said that he would welcome

gay people into our church. Not everyone in the group agreed, but the conversation was open and respectful. I shared my beliefs, and was greeted with love and affirmation.

Freed from the secrecy of my teenage years, I've been able to fully participate in the life of the church. Its wonderful. Still, a part of me wants to say "Where were you when I needed you?" I'm no longer constrained by secrecy, but many people in my church are still suffering. I know of people who are afraid to talk about their gay siblings or children. One family disappeared for months while their teenage daughter struggled with an abusive relationship. And there is still no sex ed curriculum in Sunday school or youth group. Many people in my church, and every church, are struggling with issues of sexuality. We must not let them to struggle alone, or wait for them to come to us. We need to reach out in our worship, our Sunday school, our Bible studies, and our youth groups and break the silence about sexuality.