

Statement Delivered as an Overture Advocate in Support of  
Overture 04.01, The Heartland Overture  
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I was at school on the morning of September 11, 2001. I teach special education classes in high school in the Ossining Public School System. Like most everyone else, we at first thought it was an accident. Eventually, we knew that was not true. At one point that morning, I climbed into the top of our school tower, overlooking the Hudson River. From nearly 30 miles away, at I looked south, I could see the smoke.

We spent the rest of that day trying to help 1400 adolescents and one another get through what none of us had been prepared for. We did the best we could, staying close to each other - knowing there would be a long road ahead. Prayers were all around, silent and otherwise.

New York Theological Seminary was just 20 blocks from Ground Zero; our classes for the night and were cancelled. Still, I wasn't ready to go home. I couldn't. I needed to do something. Go somewhere...

Just a few weeks prior to the attack on the United States of America, I had finished my second intensive summer unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) as a Chaplain Intern at Westchester Medical Center. That's where I headed. Driving there, I kept thinking about prayer and presence...

I went to see Michael, an eleven-year-old who had been hit squarely in the chest while riding his bicycle from in between parked cars into the path of an oncoming large van. Airlifted directly to the Medical Center, he was not expected to survive when he made it into PICU (the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit), which was my unit for the ten week term.

However, God and Michael had other plans.

By that evening of 9/11 he had been moved to a step-down unit, a less intensive care setting. He still could not speak, had a partial body cast, and limited movement – but his eyes spoke, as they always did, and it was clear he had every intention of getting better.

One of the beds in the room had been removed to provide more space for his care. Two TV's faced us, turned slightly apart from one another. The TV facing away from Michael was on CNN. Michael's TV was on Arnold the cartoon show.

When saw me coming, he smiled, grabbed my hand, and pointed to the TV that we watched and laughed at together. At one point, I stole a quick glance at the other TV; I prayed for those in the city and all that was to come, asked for guidance to follow God's will, and then I turned back to Michael and Arnold.

I remember thinking: The rescuers were where they were supposed to be, and so was I. God had called us each according to God's needs, as God always does. It had nothing to do with being Gay, Straight, Lesbian, Bisexual, or .Transgender

We were there, present, in prayer, and in response to that call. That's what I believe mattered then – that's what I believe matters – here - now.

In 2004, as a Christian, an Elder, and a man who is openly gay, I addressed this committee as an overture advocate for the Presbytery of Hudson River and the removal of G-6.0106b.

I spoke about the effects of G-6.0106b, the unconscionable violence it set into motion, the smoldering human pain it left in its wake.

I expressed then as I do now the disbelief that this Christian Church, based on the inclusive love of Jesus, could intentionally or otherwise be complicit in any form of violence, ever creating standards that established a second, sub-class of humans – judging not just the people it excludes, but God and God's creation in the process.

Today, we sometimes seem suspended into states of distraction and denial regarding the impact of G-6.0106b, coming to believe that we are doing God's will by an ordination here and there of people who are LGBT, – while the consuming twin illnesses of hatred and homophobia feast on our inability to remove G-6.0106b and AI.

If some of us sound certain of what needs to be done, it not out of arrogance.

It is from a belief that God could not want us to be the cause of the suffering and pain inextricably tied to G-6.0106b and AI. The cost in human tragedy of G-6.0106b in our Constitution goes far beyond our church, just as we hope our good works in the name of Christ do. The message we project of marginalization adds to the ill winds that lead young people and others to attempts at self injury and suicide. It fomented bullying and bigotry in our schools and the workplace, curbings and hate crimes in our neighborhoods that exceed their statistics – and we, as leaders in our church share responsibility for these wounds to spirit and body.

Today, I serve as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbytery of Hudson River, sent to address this committee, once more, as its advocate. I am humbled by the privilege and the weight of this responsibility. I feel the same in my role as interim minister, serving the Palisades Presbyterian Church, in Palisades, New York.

Less than a year ago, I was called, examined, and ordained not because I am gay, but because a congregation believed I was a qualified candidate who could serve them well. I am doing my best to do just that, as a servant leader of the PCUSA.

There are many of my sisters and brothers who are LGBT waiting to serve the congregations, hospitals, specialized ministries, and more to which they have been called. There are already enough guidelines in our Constitution to assess whether or not a candidate is qualified to serve, without a specific amendment used only to exclude candidates who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender.

G-6.0106b is a barbed wire aimed at the Spirit and Creation. As with all spiritual barriers to God and God's calling, it needs to go.

Until G-6.0106b and AI has been deleted, many people who are LGBT in leadership across this denomination will stay hidden or deny their own sacred mystery of humanity out of fear for what might happen if they and their light came out from under the basket.

And, the fear works. This fear has already divided us and is relied upon by some to keep the status quo.

People who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender who seek to serve this church are not dividing it, the uneven distribution of equity and power enforced by G-6.0106b is the cause of our division.

The Heartland Overture brings us back together.

Only by making this a safe and welcoming church can true unity ever be achieved. We place our hope and trust in your and God's hands. Please endorse the Heartland Overture if you find your heart and Spirit call you to do so. If not, be sure you are loved in our hearts regardless, for it is out of gratitude for the love God has given us, that we can love even those with whom we disagree. It is out of that same love that I know we can learn to live faithfully together, without G-6.0106b or AI.

God bless you and thank you.