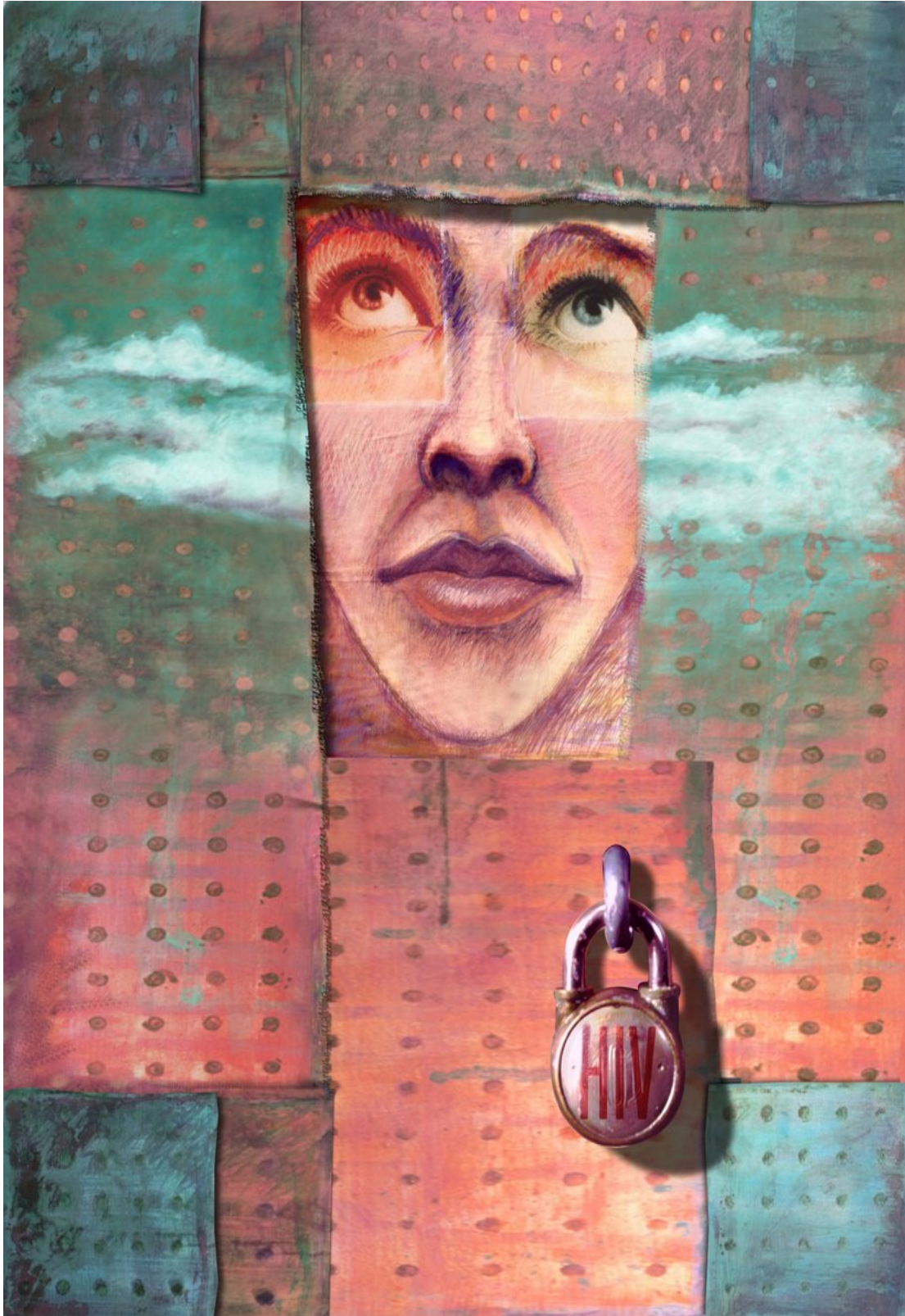


Homophobia  
By Rev. Charles Straight



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Homophobia is the irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against those who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Questioning (LGBTQ). It can also mean hatred, hostility, disapproval of, or prejudice towards the LGBTQ community. It may even include acts of violence.<sup>1</sup>

HIV-related discrimination and homophobia impede community based efforts to combat HIV disease among Latino and African Americans gay and bisexual men. Why is this important? Because as many as 46 percent of Black gay men in some major cities are HIV-positive. This is a group that we must reach if we are to reduce the rate of new infections in our community.

What is the basis of stigma and homophobia: SIN!! Sin is a part of the human condition and generates the behavior that separates human beings from God and each other. Sin is much more than lying, stealing, and who's sleeping with whom. Sin is also that thing which causes us to mistreat each other.

Prejudice, bigotry, racism, sexism, and homophobia are not black/white, men/women, rich/poor, or gay/straight issues. They are issues of sin. Prejudice, bigotry, racism, sexism, and homophobia have also kept us from doing what God has called us as Christians to do in Jesus' name; and that is *to love each other as He has loved us.*

We all know why, as people of God, we battle sin. Sin keeps us from achieving our holy state of fellowship with God. Not only does sin keep us from being in fellowship with God, it often keeps us from being in the right relationships with one another. It is sin that causes us to stop speaking to each other for years over things that should not have mattered in the first place.

When we are in fellowship with God, all is well with our souls. We have a sense that all is right with the world. Even if all is not right with the world, through prayer and supplication we feel alright.

When we organize as an HIV ministry, we are not just responding to a public health crisis, we are responding to the world's need for love and compassion, the way Jesus instructed us to love and show compassion. We cannot have an effective HIV ministry with one hand tied behind our backs.

To simply say “love the sinner but hate the sin” is working with one hand tied behind our backs. To love the sinner but hate the sin is disingenuous and says to the subject of the statement that there is something wrong with him or her that is not wrong with the rest of us. Jesus did not love with one hand behind his back; He did not lead this kind of example for us to follow.



A protest by the Westboro Baptist Church, a group identified by the Anti-Defamation League as “virulently” homophobic.<sup>1,2</sup>

Jesus extended both His hands, even to the point of giving them over to the nails on the cross. Now that's love! As His people, who are called by His name, we must also show that kind of unconditional love when we engage in ministry to the world! I John 4:20 says “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.”<sup>3</sup>

If then, stigma and discrimination remain among the greatest impediments to local efforts to combat HIV disease in our churches and community, we the body of Christ must put our love into action to fight this behavior. Love must be put into action the way God demonstrates His loves for us. Romans 5:8 “But God demonstrates His love for us this way, while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” He does not look at who we are, but His love is placed into action based on what we need.<sup>4</sup>

Our ministry to others cannot be based on gender, class, sexual orientation, or any of the things that makes us human. It must be based on what makes us divine, and that is the love of God that is within us.

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## Endnotes:

1. Homophobia. Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homophobia>
2. Anti-Defamation League on the Westboro Baptist Church [http://www.adl.org/special\\_reports/wbc/default.asp](http://www.adl.org/special_reports/wbc/default.asp)
3. I John 4:20
4. Romans 5:8