

# Stand together in solidarity

12 testimonies from sexual minorities worldwide



ENGLISH

# Overview - 12 testimonies from sexual minorities worldwide

- 5 **Aika Taira** lives in Kanagawa, Japan. After his coming out as gay he listened to the call to become a pastor. He preaches the gospel to those who have been hurt by the church and to those who hurt others, misusing Christianity.
- 6 After 27 years of priesthood **Heino Nurk** was dismissed as a Lutheran pastor. He feels that he cannot change his Lutheran spirituality, nor his sexuality.
- 7 **Ferdinand** is a 46 year old gay man from Jamaica who had to let go of his calling as a Christian minister.
- 8 **Diego Acevedo** is a gay man from Columbia, South America and was searching his path under the dark shadow of magisterial documents of the Roman Catholic Church.
- 9 **Lukas Mukongo** is an African Catholic gay man who works for Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) as a fieldworker in the rural parts of northern Namibia.
- 10 **WonGyeong Jeong**, a 25 years old woman from Korea who believes in Jesus.
- 11 **Confidence Abena Takyi** is a 28 years old lesbian from Ghana. Sometimes she feels bombarded by biblical stories used to justify homophobia.
- 12 **Nisha** migrated from India to the usa at the age of two. She feels most at home in urban communities of color. Nisha and her partner, Carissa welcomed their son, Nishant into the world on June 25, 2013.
- 13 Let My Life Be Mine, O God. A prayer by **Ryan Sumedi Hutagalung**, an Indonesian gay Christian.
- 14 **Setya El** is a Muslim woman from Jakarta/Indonesia, who felt different from early childhood. Re-reading Holy Scriptures helps her to find God's purpose in her life.
- 15 **Zanele Muholi** is a South African black lesbian, who works as a visual activist and photographer. As a spiritual activist MO(U)RNING is an expression of her spiritual journey which aims to denounce, to expose truths and the cruel aspects of 21st century South African society where loving can be dangerous. Her exhibition documents hate crimes against sexual minorities people in South Africa.
- 16 **Roman Zuiv** experienced severe persecution by several churches in the Ukraine. He seeks asylum abroad.

# Editorial

“Stand together in solidarity” presents twelve testimonies from religious lesbians and gays around the globe. They stand for sexual minorities and their communities worldwide. Believers and non-believers are invited to read and listen to their experiences and – due to space limitation - shortened reflections on spirituality and sexuality.

Their call wants to raise awareness on the need to stand together to do no harm amidst diversity and different interpretations of sacred texts regarding God's will for sexuality.

The booklet will reveal that there is common ground to stand together for human value, dignity and rights and against any form of violence, while we continue to journey together towards deeper understanding of human sexuality and diversity.

*The editorial team*

*Judith Kotzé, Inclusive & Affirming Ministries, South Africa*

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# Preface

"The World Council of Churches (WCC), as an expression of its commitment to justice, human dignity and liberation has, since its inception, been a faithful partner of people who have experienced discrimination and exclusion – racial and ethnic minorities, those with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, Dalits and others – in their struggles. For decades, The WCC facilitated reflection and analysis, advocacy and communication among marginalized people, supporting their efforts at local, national and international levels, and encouraging churches and societies to be more just, responsive and inclusive."

We call for specific attention on the issues of homophobic violence at the 10th General Assembly of the WCC at Busan (South Korea) in November 2013.

Stigmatization by church authorities has a very deep power to create internalized homophobia. It is often rooted in homophobic messages that come from churches and religious leaders and which have the power to influence society, culture and state authorities. Homophobic violence based on religious arguments has become an increasing problem in many areas of the world.

That is why we share this message for religious communities:

**Stop the violence! Do no harm!**

**Stand in solidarity for the worth and dignity of every person as a child of God!**

*Desmond Tutu  
Archbishop Emeritus Anglican Church  
South Africa*

*Bärbel Wartenberg-Potter  
retired Bishop Lutheran Church  
Germany*



Aika Taira

Aika Taira lives in Kanagawa, Japan. After his coming out as gay he listened to the call to become a pastor. He preaches the gospel to those who have been hurt by the church and to those who hurt others by misusing Christianity.

"My name is Aika Taira from Japan. As a 44 year old gay man, I consider Okinawa as my spiritual home.

There was a time when I was convinced that Christian beliefs and sexuality are not compatible. At that time I felt that I cannot continue with my life and considered taking my life. Through many precious meetings, I have come to believe that a variety of sexualities are a blessing from God. Today preaching this has become my mission. For this reason, I came out and became an ordained pastor. I want to preach the gospel to sexual minorities who are being hurt by Christianity and I want to preach to churches that hurt sexual minorities using Christianity.

There are so many people who belong to sexual minorities who have visited a church, and almost all of them leave churches saying that there is no place where they can be themselves. I have heard a Reverend saying, 'we have no sexual minorities in our church, but I would like to welcome them if they visited.' But I know two gay persons of that church who are still in the closet. A courageous stance is required to welcome sexual minorities, not as visitors but as sisters and brothers."

"My name is Heino Nurk. I am a 54 year old gay man from Estonia. I come from a Lutheran family, was baptized as a child and became active in the Church during my teenage years.

I received a call to ministry and was ordained as a priest in 1983. For twenty-seven years I served as a Lutheran priest until I was defrocked due to founding the Association of Gay Christians in 2010.

My sexuality and spirituality are both given to me, the two innermost and deepest characteristics of me as a human being and a person. I can change neither one.

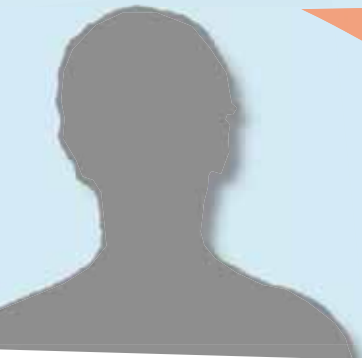
During the time of the Communist regime as active Christians we were all treated as suspicious and dangerous. Ironically, what I have experienced due to my spirituality is very similar to what I am experiencing now due to my sexuality. I have been dismissed from ministry and a teaching position at the theological school of the church due to 'spreading the heresy and immoral behaviour' in response to starting a group for Gay Christians.

I am not trying to destroy the Church and do harm to anybody. I am just honest about myself and following the call I accepted as a young man. I am guided now by the same theology I have studied and used in my ministry for over thirty years."



Heino Nurk

After 27 years of priesthood Heino Nurk was dismissed as a Lutheran pastor. He feels that he cannot change his Lutheran spirituality, nor his sexuality.



Ferdinand  
Brown  
(pseudonym)

Ferdinand Brown is a 46 year old gay man from Jamaica who had to let go of his calling as a Christian minister.

"My name is Ferdinand Brown (pseudonym). I am a 46 year old Jamaican and a gay man. My life's journey with sexuality and spirituality has been a long, tortuous journey filled with issues of shame, self-denial, verbal aggression, hurt, anger, and eventually self-acceptance and liberation.

I was brought up in a religious home and from an early age I was very religious, active in various ministries of the Baptist church and especially the sacraments meant a lot to me.

However, in my teenage years, I began to realise that I was sexually attracted to guys. The teaching of my church was that this was wrong. This led me to seek to pray my way out of my sexual orientation.

I wanted to share my struggles with someone, but dared not because the people around me were so judgemental that I believed they would expose me. I suffered in silence. I thought this was my burden and had to bear it.

Even though I had doubts about my sexuality, I entered seminary. It was in seminary that I found more liberal theological texts that held out a glimmer of hope for me that I could be simultaneously Christian and gay.

I was uncomfortable with living a lie. In private I was a gay man, but in public I was a faithful Christian minister. I suffered in silence for years until I left the church I loved and had pledged to serve to the end. This was extremely painful.

Having emerged from this battered emotional life in the church I now say to others: 'Lets stand in solidarity together to do no harm.'



"For those who grew up in the shadow of the Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church, who live sexual orientation or gender identity different from the heteronormative one, this road is tortuous.

This journey started for me in sermons against the 'depravity' of homosexuals from Priests who themselves engaged in homoerotic relationships. According to official church documents I was not only 'depraved' but 'evil'.

After an intense struggle, I realized that homosexuality was part of my being and that I had no choice but to accept it.

The death of a very dear and close relative, also HIV positive and gay, made me think deeply. I knew I had to accept my sexual orientation in a constructive way.

In the midst of the shock of his death, I met a small group of people, 'Fraternity of Friendship', diverse in sexual orientation and gender identity, from different church traditions who gathered to pray, to share the gospel and fellowship.

With them I started to walk in the joyful experience of feeling not a 'mistake' but a beloved son of God."



Diego  
Acevedo

Diego Acevedo is a gay man from Columbia, South America and was searching for his path under the dark shadow of magisterial documents of the Roman Catholic Church.



## Lukas Mukongo

Lukas Mukongo is an African Catholic gay man who works for Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) as a fieldworker in the rural parts of northern Namibia.

"My name is Lukas Mukongo. I am a 30 year old African gay man. I was born in a small village called Ohongo in the northern part of Namibia, Oshiwambo culture. My family are Christians of the Catholic Church.

I became an active church member when I was 14 years old and in school. I became a Sunday school teacher and altar boy. This was challenging because I started looking at boys and realising I had feelings for them. In the village I lived we had no access to information, not even radios, so I did not know what the feelings meant.

I always wanted to come out and tell my Priest who I am, but he kept on postponing our appointment. When I finally cornered him, he advised me not to tell anyone besides him. He was afraid that the community may lose their trust in me and that it could affect my responsibilities in the church. Oshiwambo culture does not allow a gay person to enter the church. My culture believes that it is un-African to be homosexual.

It was important for me to tell my mother that I was gay. The Priest went with me. I openly talked about it and the news spread to the rest of the community.

I chose to stay in the church and the church people allowed me. It was my good behaviour, leadership in church, integrity and taking part in uplifting my community that made it easy for them to accept me as gay.

I am an African and I ask that we stand together and work for our God."

"My name is WonGyeong Jeong.

I am female and 25 years old. You can find me in Daegu, Korea.

I haven't found my spiritual home yet, but I believe it is somewhere for me.

Usually I introduce myself as a happy lesbian who believes in Jesus. It is my testimony that I accept my sexuality in Jesus. I went to church when I was a kid. Since then, I have believed in Jesus.

Especially I love Immanuel, God with us. When I realized the truth of myself I thought God would not be with me. My church had a very conservative view on the Bible - the literal interpretation. The church taught me that you can be forgiven all the sins such as murder, rape, theft and so on. But there was no homosexuality on the list. My struggle with my homosexuality and my faith continued for more than nine years. At the end of the harsh time, I travelled. Sitting on the beach and looking at the sea, I thought, thought and thought. 'Why did God, who created the vast sea, the endless sky and countless living things, make me a homosexual? God loves all the things he created. But what about me? What about other homosexuals?' I realized I was wrong and God loves me whether I'm a homosexual or not. Finally I found inner peace."



WonGyeong  
Jeong

WonGyeong Jeong, a 25 year old woman from South Korea who believes in Jesus.



Confidence  
Abena Takyi

Confidence Abena Takyi is a 28 year old lesbian from Ghana. Sometimes she feels bombarded by biblical stories used to justify homophobia.

"My name is Confidence Abena Takyi. I am a 28 year old, a lesbian from Ghana and a practicing Christian. I grew up in the Baptist church, but later became Anglican.

Being Lesbian is a part of me that I can no longer hide. I am no longer willing to fight my sexuality. I tell my friends to live their lives as if we live in one single room with rules of LOVE that cut across anything. The time has also come to begin preaching the true humanity of Jesus Christ – who I believe is the one and true Saviour.

Some biblical stories are often used to justify homophobia. There are times when I feel like I'm being bombarded like the people in Sodom and Gomorrah by hostile interpretations of Genesis 18.

It is up to God, not humans, to decide who will go to heaven and who will go to hell.

I have a sad experience that taught me about 'standing together'. The only brother I have happens to be gay too and this makes my mum really sad. I have managed to explain to my mum why my brother is very different and the process he had to go through to get this far. She has no more problems with my brother, but my dilemma is how I reveal my sexual orientation to her now. There is this side of me that is so scared to tell her.

I stand firmly behind my brother and so does he. We really need to tell our stories so everyone can get involved."

"My name is Nisha Purushotham. I am 43 years old. In terms of gender and sexual orientation, I identify as a queer woman.

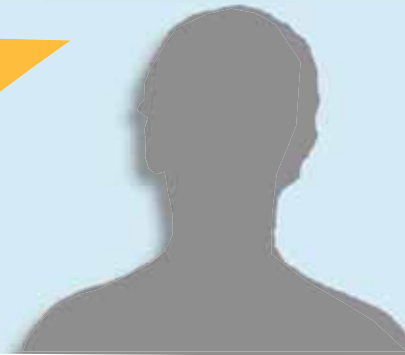
*"There's a peace in the rubble,  
where the bombs and children fell.  
There's a truth in the silence  
only those with courage tell.*

*There's deliverance for the forgotten  
at the height of their distress.  
'Cause there's a stream of living water  
in the heart of the wilderness."*

@"Living Water" by Nisha

My spirituality is grounded in an awareness of a boundless energy of love. I sense this love manifesting in many ways – a complex eco system, grassroots social movements for peace with justice and art and music that viscerally connect us with beauty and suffering. I also sense this love manifesting in diverse expressions of human sexuality which is an essential aspect of what it means to be a human be-ing.

The death of my mother when I was four led to an outpouring of support from the local church to which my family belonged. I experienced boundless generosity from this faith community and understood deeply the power of community. As a queer immigrant woman of color, I have experienced exclusion in many different settings throughout my life. I have found great strength in standing with others excluded for similar and different reasons. I believe that the work of transformation for the benefit of all must begin and be led by populations on the margins."



Nisha  
Purushotham

Nisha migrated from India to the USA at the age of two. She feels most at home in urban communities of color. Nisha and her partner, Carissa welcomed their son, Nishant into the world on June 25, 2013.



"I came to a realization that I was different from many of my friends because I didn't like to play with other girls of my age. I preferred to play with the boys. I liked their games and their toys better than playing with dolls that my parents gave me.

As I was growing up, I found it difficult to practice my faith (Islam). I didn't want to wear 'mukena' (a woman's prayer dress in Islam), but would people stare at me if I wore a man's dress? Would I be standing among the men or among the women?

My family still does not know that I am a lesbian. They always push me to get married, especially since I am now in my thirties, an age considered by most people in my country as critical for a woman. But so far I could always find a reason to delay getting married.

I am fortunate because I came to know programs organized by Jakarta Theological Seminary (JTS) and the Ardhanary Institute [a lesbian organization]. I learned that Scriptures have to be re-read and re-interpreted wisely so that we can find the message for the people of the past and what it means today. I wish JTS to continue its struggle in helping lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people like me to find God's purpose in our lives."



Setya El

Setya El is a Muslim woman, from Jakarta/Indonesia, who felt different from early childhood. Re-reading Holy Scriptures helps her to find God's purpose in her life.



## Zanele Muholi

Zanele Muholi is a South African black lesbian, who works as a visual activist and photographer. As a spiritual activist MO(U)RNING is an expression of her spiritual journey.

Zanele's solo exhibition in 2012, titled MO(U)RNING documents hate crimes against LGBTI people in South Africa. She aims to denounce and expose truths and the cruel aspects of 21st century South African society where loving can be dangerous.

- 2004** - **Mpho Setshedi** (27), lesbian soccer player, shot dead in her home in Yeoville, Johannesburg.
- 2006** - **Zoliswa Nkonyana** (19), lesbian, stoned to death in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. The case has appeared in magistrate's court 30 times.
- 2007** - **Madoe Mafubedu** (16), lesbian, raped and stabbed to death in Kliptown, Soweto.
  - **Thokozane Qwabe** (23), lesbian, stoned to death in Ezakheni, Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal.
  - Partners **Salome Masooa** (23), lesbian mother, and **Sizakele Sigasa** (34), lesbian, both raped, tortured and murdered in Meadowlands, Soweto.
- 2008** - **Eudy Simelane** (31), lesbian, raped and murdered in KwaThema, Springs.
  - **Khanyiswa (Lhoyie) Hani** (25), stabbed and murdered in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth.



- **Sibongile Mphelo** (21), raped, her vagina mutilated, shot and killed in Strand, Cape Town.
- **Daisy Dube**, trans woman in her 20s, shot dead in Yeoville, Johannesburg.

**2009**

- **Girly Nkosi** (37), lesbian, stabbed and died of her injuries in KwaThema, Springs.

**2010**

- **Millicent Gaika** (31), lesbian, suffered 'curative rape' and severely beaten in Gugulethu, Cape Town.

**2011**

- **Nokuthula Radebe** (20), lesbian, strangled with one of her shoelaces in Everest, Thokoza, Ekurhuleni.
- **Noxolo Nogwaza** (24), lesbian, brutally beaten to death in KwaThema, Johannesburg.
- **Nqobile Khumalo** (23), lesbian, murdered, her body found in a shallow grave near her parents' home in KwaMashu F-section, Durban.
- **Ntsiki Tyatyeka** (21), lesbian, murdered, her decomposed body discovered a few metres from her home in Nyanga East, Cape Town.
- **Tshuku Ncobo** (26), found dead – believed to have committed suicide.

**2012**

- **Thapelo Makutle** (24), gay man, brutally murdered in Kuruman, Northern Cape.
- **Phumeza Nkolonzi** (22), lesbian, shot three times in her home in front of her grand mother, in Mau Mau Nyanga, Cape Town.
- **Andrita Morifi**, young lesbian, brutally killed in Limpopo.
- **Neil Daniels**, transgender person murdered in Cape Town.
- **Sanna Supa** (28), lesbian, shot dead in her home in Soweto.
- **Sasha Lee Gordon**, trans woman, stabbed to death in Wynberg.
- **Hendrietta Thapelo Morifi** (29), known as Andritha, lesbian, murdered in her home in Plol Park Mokopane.

**2013**

**WHEN WILL WE STAND TOGETHER TO DO NO HARM?**



Roman Zuiv

Roman Zuiv experienced severe persecution by several churches in the Ukraine. He seeks asylum abroad.

"At 15 I was already an elder of a congregation because all males were in prison for their faith. At the age of 22 I was excommunicated from the congregation, because of my sexual orientation, despite my strong dedication to mission. Later I was ministering in the Latter Day Saints church. When they learned about my activity supporting Human rights of LGBTs, I was completely expelled, even as a church member.

Facing so much discrimination in the Ukraine I decided to build up my own Christian congregation where gay Christians and others can have a safe place to worship.

But during our first worship service the congregation 'Church of Saint Cornelius' was severely attacked by ultra-radical Nazis who had their faces covered with masks and used fire. My apartment was burned and I was very blessed and lucky that my life was saved. The Russian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Ukrainian Church and others put pressure on the authorities to destroy my community and our activities as a 'dangerous menace for our nation'. The Orthodox Church made strong petitions to the government, asking to close our organization supporting LGBT Christians."

## IMPRINT

English version. (Translations into French, Indonesian, Russian, Spanish and Korean language available; Japanese and German are in preparation.)

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"Stand together in solidarity - 12 testimonies from sexual minorities worldwide".

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Financed by: ECPI-Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives and Global Justice Institute (MCC)  
with the support of Arcus Foundation & European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups (Reprint 2014).

Print: Seoul, 2013. Reprint: Munich, 2014.



European Forum  
of LGBT  
Christian Groups

