

JOURNEYING to FREEDOM through CHRIST

By Sharon Chelvi Moorthy

Finding freedom from sexual brokenness, especially for those struggling with homosexuality, often involves a long and challenging journey. Still, as strugglers become aware of the root causes of their same-sex attraction, and allow for healing of damaged emotions and distorted thought patterns within a supportive setting, they discover that lasting change is possible.



Rev. Tryphena Law: From struggling pastor to pastoring strugglers

No one knows this better than Rev. Tryphena Law, Director of PLUC (Pursuing Liberty Under Christ) and an Overcomer herself. As a child growing up, Tryphena had struggled with her femininity due to poor self-image and unkind labelling by others. Her search for affirmation of gender led to finding her security in some women friends, and a closet lesbian lifestyle ensued. A Christian at that time, she was convinced she was living in sin, but did not know the way out. This double-life grew increasingly unbearable as she continued to serve actively in Christian ministry, all the while painfully aware of her secret struggle and terrified that people would find out. In desperation, she sought help from a trusted Christian counsellor. As difficult as it was to expose her dark secret to the scrutiny of others and worse, to hurt the people who loved her, she knew it was even harder to go on living a lie. What began then was an amazing journey with God towards healing and restoration. Many Christians played a crucial role by journeying with her till she was able to embrace her true identity and satisfy her long-desired affirmation as a precious woman of God.

In 2003, as she was seeking God for fresh ministry direction, Pastor Tryphena was connected to a newly-formed ministry to the sexually broken called PLUC (Pursuing Liberty Under Christ). A request for her to join their prayer group soon led to her becoming a board member. It was around this time also that PLUC was officially recognised as a member ministry of Exodus Global Alliance, a world-wide Christian organisation helping people affected by homosexuality through the power of Jesus Christ. In 2004, the leadership of PLUC was handed over to Pastor Tryphena who, together with Rev. Martha Hor (board member and strong supporter), has led PLUC into its 10th official year of ministry this year.

Today, PLUC is known in Malaysia and the surrounding regions as the Christian ministry which assists those who desire to overcome homosexuality and provides support



Cozy guest reception at PLUC

to their family and friends. Its primary aim is to reach out to those who struggle with same-sex attraction, bringing them to the Lord and restoring their sexual identities to His original intention. Both believers and seekers are ministered to within a Christian setting, and their restoration happens under the healing power of Jesus. They are then empowered to take responsibility in maintaining moral and relational wholeness.

Pastor Tryphena explains, "Among those who are counselled, one third do not want to change while one third now abstain from and no longer live the homosexual lifestyle although they might still have a certain attraction to it. The remaining one third are open to a heterosexual relationship that may lead to marriage, and no longer live the homosexual life. Last year, for example, three of them got married."

"The key thing to note is that PLUC does not change a person from homosexual to heterosexual. PLUC encourages people to pursue something better and that is pursuing Christ, pursuing holiness. God says, 'Be holy for I am holy'. We are to pursue liberty under Christ. I like the scripture 1 John 2:3, "...if we truly desire the Lord, we will obey...". I may have a sexual tendency, or an attraction, but I'm choosing to obey the Lord. Cultivating the spiritual disciplines enables us to say 'no' to the desires," she stresses.

Those seeking ministry arrive at PLUC's centre in a variety of ways. Some are referred, both by churches and Christian/secular counselling centres, while others discover PLUC through receiving their brochures or when doing an online Google search. People also find them by word of mouth, or from attending an awareness talk they have given. Strugglers are expected to call or write in personally before they are invited to the centre for counselling. As such, parents who call to ask for help for their children will be encouraged to ask their son or daughter to call in themselves, to avoid anyone being "forced" into

pastoral counselling. The counselling is carried out in English or Mandarin, as required.

After the first session, the counselling continues over an agreed number of sessions. An evaluation is then done to see if more journeying together is required. The journeying is always done with two counsellors to one person, never one-to-one. Pastoral counselling is given priority, i.e. using prayer, the Word of God, shepherding and discipling the person seeking help, while secular counselling skills are also incorporated as needed. The person

might then be introduced to a support group which generally runs as a 1½ year commitment. Currently, there are three types of support groups running – for strugglers, parents and spouses – ranging in frequency from monthly to once in four months based on the needs and the availability of the counsellors. For the strugglers group, counsellors journey with them first before deciding if they should be added. The parents' support group offers a safe place, especially given the increase of parents calling in because their children are struggling but refusing help. It is a valuable platform to share feelings, receive teaching and understanding. The spouses' group supports the wife/husband who discovers their spouse is a homosexual.

Besides this, PLUC gives talks to churches by invitation, often bringing awareness of the homosexual issue by using a Sunday morning session to address parents, youth and children. They are also invited to speak in schools, Christian Fellowship groups in varsities, youth camps and uniformed bodies such as Girl's Brigade/Boy's Brigade. PLUC also serves in Bible seminaries, teaching on pastoral counselling for ministering to homosexuals and how to journey with them. One of PLUC's main objectives is to see many more Christians journeying with strugglers. In this sense, one of their crucial roles is training up people to do the work of journeying, especially in the key cities across the nation.



Support groups offer a safe place

Counselling rooms for families and individuals



As a faith-based ministry, PLUC is funded by love offerings from churches as part of their mission giving, honorariums from preaching/teaching related to the ministry, from people who have journeyed with them and from support group members. Certain individuals have also made themselves approachable for financial support in times of urgent need. Pastor Tryphena shares candidly that while the funds that come in often do not tally with the expenses incurred from rental, utilities, staff salaries, materials and resources, God never fails to supply their needs. The present office, discreetly located in a quiet shophouse area, is tastefully furnished with donated items and set up to facilitate the counselling sessions. There are three cosy, private rooms that cater for individual and family sessions, and a main area where training is conducted.

Nevertheless, there are many ways that churches can partner with PLUC, and financial giving is just one way of doing that. Larger churches who want to get involved with PLUC can organise an awareness seminar/talk at their own venue, while smaller churches might consider combining with other local churches within the community. Pastor Tryphena feels that the ministry is best run as social work or a community project where various denominations and churches can pool their resources and work together.

When they refer a person for counselling, churches can partner with PLUC by sending along a leader willing to journey with the person. This offers an excellent on-the-job training opportunity, where the leader can learn firsthand how to journey with someone. There may also be leaders who would like to be trained to journey, although they have no one to refer. In such a case, he or she must get prior approval from their pastors. Other criteria for training include having a certain maturity in the faith, being a leader/cell leader in church and being emotionally healthy. Volunteers are also welcome to help in other practical ways – all that is needed is to have a heart for the ministry.

And Pastor Tryphena certainly has a big heart for the ministry – along with big dreams. One dream is to see Christian professional counsellors with a burden to journey

with homosexuals working in close partnership with pastoral counsellors. This would bring together the best of both approaches – a combination of professional and pastoral counselling that benefits the struggler. She also dreams of seeing many more cities in Malaysia having a place where strugglers can be referred to. This is not necessarily a full-time place with full-time counsellors but a facility that is already equipped to help people or start support groups. This could easily be done in churches which have an existing counselling set-up. Pastor Tryphena also dreams of seeing more men involve themselves in the teams, as recovering homosexuals need to have good masculine examples to model after.

Her vision for the future is big, too. "Someday, I want to see Malaysia as a training base for third-world countries. The door has opened to Cambodia this year and there's already a work in Thailand, not to mention the huge untapped potential in neighbouring Vietnam and Laos. Malaysia is in the ideal location to be a resource centre or training base for the region."

Until that day, however, this Overcomer has no illusions about the immediate issues to be worked through. "Society sees the church as being intolerant and victimising homosexuals. That's why I see that the pressing need today is to educate people on the balance between grace and truth. A lot of times we don't know how to handle ourselves when confronted with an accusation, and we play right into the hands of the media. The church needs to have wisdom to respond. We need to face the issue and address it with our members. How should our response be? Gracious, yet holding on to the truth. PLUC is going to be very busy in this way. We need a bigger platform to create awareness and to convey truth – but most of all, to communicate grace."

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