

A secret that cannot be shared: 'Parents in the closet' at church

Previously, we read about a kind of love called 'parents in the closet.' Can this be seen in the setting of the church? It is not easy to.

Chi Leung (pseudonym) is a church leader. His eldest son has a homosexual orientation. It has been very difficult for Chi Leung to frankly share his struggles as a parent in the closet. 'As parents, we love our son and can accept him. But brothers and sisters at church may not be able to accept that. If we share about his sexual orientation, the situation may become very complicated. We worry that we may lose our son.' They have therefore been keeping it secret.

Chi Leung's eldest son has been attending church with them since childhood. When they knew that their son had same-sex attraction, they had arranged a meeting between their pastor and their son. The pastor had not disclosed to them anything that was discussed at the meeting. When the burden was too heavy to bear, Chi Leung had shared the situation with a few brothers and sisters. However, they had not asked Chi Leung or expressed care concerning the issue in the ten years or more that followed. It was as if they had not known about it.

Chi Leung is still concerned that 'the secret that cannot be shared' would somehow be made known. The pressure for the parents in the closet is immense!

'If my son's homosexual orientation is made known in the church, I'm worried that he may be viewed very differently by brothers and sisters or may even be isolated.' Chi Leung's concern is many-sided. 'If I share too much, I'm afraid I may say something inappropriate. However, I also don't want to avoid the issue. If my son changes in future, has his own family and continues to go to church, there would be fewer hurdles for him if fewer people know.' As a parent, Chi Leung's hope for his son to have his own family is natural. Whenever he attends weddings at church and is being asked about the relationship status of his son, however, he just does not feel right.

It is not easy for 'parents in the closet' to find relief for their pressure at church. The issue may even affect their own marriage. Thankfully, Chi Leung and his wife choose to support each other instead of blaming each other. They have joined a small group for 'parents in the closet' and have made friends with other parents in a similar situation. 'We understand how the members in the small group feel. We know how to communicate and we could share with the others when our burden is heavy. We can be each other's support.' A father in the group once shared his sense of guilt: 'In the past, I read a story with my child every day. I paid much attention to work later and the relationship between my son and me became distant. I still blame myself for...' Another father responded, 'There is much pressure at church. There is the tension between the role as a church leader and the role as a father.'

The struggle is intense. There are times when I struggle with faith. I hope that my child will return to God and go back to church one day.' Chi Leung also hopes that his son will not only experience parental love but also the love and care of the church.

The lyrics of a worship song goes like this: 'We love because God first loved us. However strong you are, do not fly by yourself. Heaven is where love is.' Chi Leung is supported by the small group for 'parents in the closet.' How many parents with 'secrets that cannot be shared' are being hidden in the church today?