Safe Place-sponsored panel discussion covers biological, moral, biblical angles

By Cory Anderson
News Editor

The Science Center lecture hall was packed this Monday with students, faculty, and community members trying to communicate their ideas and questions about homosexuality.

The forum, sponsored by the student organization Safe Place and facilitated by University Advocate, was so popular that the discussion had to be moved from the Seminary building to Science Center room 106. Even in the Science Center, a large number of people had to stand in the back due to the lack of seating.

The original question to be addressed was, “Is sexual orientation biological, or can it be changed?” The morality of homosexuality, and the safety of individuals and groups expressing opinions on the topic, also became focuses of discussion.

Dr. Enos Martin, bishop in the Lancaster Mennonite Conference and professor of psychiatry at Pennsylvania State University’s College of Medicine, said that God can free us from whatever plagues us, whether it be child abuse, homosexuality, or pornography addiction. Many in the audience took offense to homosexuality lumped in with child abuse, and Martin assured them that he was not trying to offend anyone.

Panelist Bill Taylor told of his upbringing in a “dysfunctional home” and said it drove him “into the world of homosexuality” by the time he reached college.

But, Taylor said, after living in his problem he sought out a better way of life. “God has moved me into the world of heterosexuali- ty,” he said.

Taylor is now executive director at Day Seven Ministries, a Christian organization devoted to helping people resolve sexual conflicts.

“It’s not anybody’s business to judge how I interpret God,” said Nancy Freyberg, executive director of the Parent’s and Kid’s Foundation.

Freyberg had been married and had children, but she did not feel happy with her marriage. After she experienced an emotional breakdown, a psychiatrist opened her to the possibility that she was homosexual. She then separated from her husband.

“I don’t ever debate scrip- ture,” said Freyberg. “Not because I’m afraid to, but because I think you can make the Bible say anything you want to say, and what it says is that God loves me the way I am, and that has worked for me.”

PSU Professor Emeritus of Biology Dr. Carl Keener presented an information-dense summary of research on the biology of homosexuality.

He cited pedigrees, studies, comparisons of identical and fraternal twins, and molecular genetics, concluding that biology plays some role in determining sexual orientation.

Audience members were given the opportunity to address members on the panel with their questions after the panelists had stated their basics views.

One issue raised was whether it is safe to be openly homosexual. While all panelists did agree that homosexuals should not have to face such dangers, Martin said, “I feel unsafe sharing my opinion [that homosexuality is a sin].”

After more and more discussion, the audience became increasingly active in asking questions until finally the allotted two hours were up, and the forum concluded with a few last questions and final statements by the panel.

One of the final questions from the audience was, “Dr. Martin, are you saying that you have never met and can never imagine a person that is gay and is content with their sexuality and is loved by God and is in a right relationship with God?”

Dr. Martin said, “(The Bible) calls us from all lusts of the flesh, which includes all of the things we’re talking about.”

After each panelist was given an opportunity to say a few last words, the program came to an end and the audience was invited to the Common Grounds coffee house to continue the discussion on their own.

**N E W S  B R I E F S**

- The EMU presidential search committee announced Wednesday that Loren Swartzendruber, now president of Hesston (KS) College, will be the next president of EMU. Swartzendruber’s term will begin July 1, 2003.

- EMU’s first ever Palestinian Awareness Week will begin next Monday, Feb. 17. Activities planned for the week include talks by Israelis and Palestinians, movies, dancing lessons, and presentations by EMU students who have been to Israel/Palestine.

- Veteran civil rights activist James Meredith will speak in Lehman Auditorium on Saturday, Feb. 15 at 1:45 p.m. Admission is free for all EMU students; others are welcome, but asked to make a $1.00 donation.

- The spring mainstage production The World is a Comedy opens this Friday, Feb. 14. It will also show on Feb. 15, 21 and 22 at 7:30 p.m. and Feb. 16 and 23 at 2:00 p.m. Call the EMU Box Office at (540) 432-4663 for ticket information.