Loving my Son as Jesus Does
by an EnCourage mother

I am a mother of a son who experiences same-sex attractions and identifies as "gay," living accordingly. He told me he was "gay" when he was in high school. My initial reaction was not so much shock as it was fear — for his future, health and happiness. Despite my anxiety, I was able to assure him that I loved him no matter what path he chose. Like any parent who watches their child make decisions that are not healthy for them, there were times of angst, disappointment, and despair, as I had to allow myself to grieve the loss of the future I'd hoped for for my son. On the other hand, there were many moments of joy, just being together as a family and celebrating graduations, birthdays, new jobs, the holidays, etc.

Holidays, in fact, can be a stressful time for families, and it is important to assess how to be united in welcoming loved ones experiencing same-sex attractions, while maintaining healthy boundaries. A mother may love her daughter, believing that homosexual acts are sinful, while her husband might disagree. If there are young children in the home, parents may not want the same-sex partners to visit because of the confusion it can cause. Perhaps the son wants to bring home his same-sex partner, expecting to share the same bedroom. These legitimate concerns need to be addressed lovingly but firmly *before* the visit. Discuss what the Church teaches and why, if the opportunity arises. Let the Holy Spirit lead. Live your faith out loud, and let your actions speak for you. Seek wise counsel, as I have, from other families who have faced these challenges and more, by connecting with your local EnCourage chapter or the EnCourage online forum.

As I grew in my faith and discovered the support of EnCourage, I learned how to accept my son's same-sex partners, welcome them into my home while setting appropriate boundaries, and love them as children of God. Since they have respected these limits, and I have treated them with dignity and God's love, we have maintained a healthy relationship, for the most part. However, there were times of misunderstandings that led to painful periods of estrangement. There was a six-month period when much prayer and

patience were needed to thaw out the relationship in time to celebrate Christmas.

Every day I thank the Lord who sustains, protects and provides for me and my family. His loving presence is the one thing that has remained constant in my life, allowing me to love my son as He loves each of His children, even when we sin. Thanks be to the Father for there is no limit to His love and mercy. I have found that it is possible to remain true to the Church's teachings while loving my son as Jesus does.

If you are a spouse, friend or family member of a loved one experiencing same-sex attractions, know that you are not alone. EnCourage is a Catholic apostolate established to provide support as you seek to keep the faith and keep your family bonds intact. Its parent apostolate, Courage International, serving those experiencing same-sex attractions, is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. Find your local EnCourage chapter and more resources on the EnCourage page on the Courage International website.