A Happy Convert

Reverend Tucker preaches to the choir

December 1, 1998 By Frank Trejo

When Paul Tucker was 16, he prayed for a sign from God. While the rest of his class was sneaking cigarettes and smooching behind the gym, Tucker was attending youth worship services and dreaming of becoming a preacher man. One night, after Tucker looked to the heavens and asked if he should enter the church, “a sensation washed over me,” he recalls a quarter-century later, “and I felt that’s what I was called to do.” Warm ecclesiastical fuzzies are nice, but Tucker needed proof. He wagered that he would follow the calling if just one person spoke to him about it the next morning at school. Off the hook? Not at all. “Before the first period bell,” he says, “three people had talked about me being a preacher.”

A quick study, Tucker soon became a United Methodist minister; by 19, the phenom was pastor of his own church in North Birmingham, Alabama. Around that time, he also began to realize he was gay. But rather than pulling the curtain on his calling, Tucker carried his robes with him out of the closet and moved to Atlanta. There he became a minister in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, a Christian group for same-sex lovers. Today, Tucker, 41, says: “My life is ministry. It’s not just what I do, it’s what I am.”

And when the issue of sex comes up, Tucker isn’t afraid to tackle it. “I believe sexuality is a gift from God,” he says. “If it wasn’t, it wouldn’t feel so good. I firmly believe that integrating the sensual and the spiritual is important for a healthy person.”

Guiding his parishioners on this path became more complicated for Tucker a year ago, when the minister tested positive. Tucker recalls his fears frankly: “I didn’t want my being positive to reflect badly on me. People still think that you must be promiscuous or something.” He was dating a man with HIV at the time of his diagnosis; only nine months before, he had tested negative.

As worried as Tucker was, he never doubted that the news was meant to be shared. “It’s part of my personality,” he says. “I didn’t want to fight this by myself.” So one Sunday last spring, Tucker calmly stood before each of the two morning services and told literally thousands of people that he had HIV. He remembers the gasp.

But, Tucker says, there was a silver lining he couldn’t then see. Now, HIV positive church members who had never spoken to him seek him out to make the most of their bond. Tucker finds comfort in this and in the knowledge that he has not hurt the church he loves. And he has taken charge of

the church’s congregational care, including an extensive AIDS program and counseling center.

But Tucker’s life is no simple *Touched by an Angel* script. Although his family has known for the better part of two decades that he is gay, only in recent years have they inched toward acceptance. “This has damaged that progress,” he says. “But there’s also an incredible sense of gratitude in me. I have so much to be thankful for.”

His health, for one. After early problems handling the side effects of his protease cocktail, Tucker says he is now coping better and his viral load is blessedly undetectable. He says it has a lot to do with attitude; knowing when to hang up the robes, kick back and relax. From his lips to God’s ears.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/A-Happy-Convert-1674-8222