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MEDIA RELEASE

GAY AND STRAIGHT PENTECOSTALS MARCH IN MARDI GRAS PARADE

Many would think that the last churches to embrace gays and lesbians would be Pentecostal churches but the Freedom 2 b(e) entry in this year's Mardi Gras parade, lead by Anthony Venn-Brown, shows that assumption could be wrong. Traditionally Pentecostal denominations, like the Assemblies of God, have required people to reject their same sex orientation and get married or leave the church.

'Even though officially there is still no doctrinal change, since I came out I've seen change happening behind the scenes and at grass roots level. People are realising that the old saying "homosexuality is a sin" is biblically unsound; there is actually no verse that says that. The word 'homosexual' didn't appear in the bible until 1946. I am educating people that homosexuality doesn't automatically equal promiscuity. My morality is a choice: my sexual orientation however isn't. That's why we have former leaders and members from the Assemblies of God, Hillsong and Christian City Churches, both gay and straight marching with us this Saturday,' Anthony Venn-Brown said.

Anthony Venn-Brown, was a former leader in the Assemblies of God and high profile preacher in Australia's mega-churches. His recently released autobiography *'A Life of Unlearning – A Journey to Find the Truth'* reveals the torturous journey many gay and lesbian Christians go through to reconcile their faith and their sexuality. 'We will be marching to encourage those still closeted in the churches to face their fears and come out and also in memory of those we've lost through suicide; three young men in the space of two years in one church in Melbourne. This madness has to stop,' Venn-Brown added.

[Freedom 2 b\(e\)](#), was co-founded by Venn-Brown just over a year ago to network gays and lesbians from Pentecostal and Charismatic backgrounds and it already has an online community of nearly 300 with 40 showing a visible presence by marching for the first time this year.

Whilst the issue of homosexuality is dividing institutionalized denominations like the Anglican Church Venn-Brown says that the transformation of the Assemblies of God over the last 30 years demonstrates that it has the potential to embrace radical change. 'I've been in Pentecostal circles since 1969 and remember when women were not allowed to preach in the pulpit, members dressed conservatively, drinking any alcohol was forbidden and services were out of touch with the issues facing everyday Australians. As the founder of Youth Alive, I was at the forefront of introducing Christian rock music and youth leaders refused to send their youth groups and prayed against me for introducing demonic music. Today that style of music is commonplace in Pentecostal Sunday services like Hillsong. Changes happened gradually but it was still radical change. Two years ago, I was the only openly gay Pentecostal in Australia but the group marching this Saturday shows that is no longer the case. Looks like I've started something', Venn-Brown concluded.

More Media information available from:

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Review copies available from **New Holland Publishers**

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