


**PASTORAL  
GUIDELINES  
TO ASSIST  
STUDENTS  
OF SAME-SEX  
ORIENTATION**

*I have come in order that they may have life  
and have it abundantly.*

John 10:10



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*Pastoral Guidelines To Assist Students Of Same-Sex Orientation  
2004*

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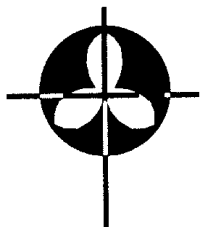
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# Contents

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1. Letter From Bishop Paul-André Durocher
2. Letter From Ontario Bishops, Spring 2003
3. Introduction
  - Purpose
  - Role Of Catholic Schools
  - Building Safe, Nurturing, Inclusive Communities
  - Invitation To Personal Reflection
  - The Path To Holiness: Called To Chastity, Intimacy and Wholeness
4. Personal Stories
5. Pastoral Practices
  - General Guidelines
  - Practical Guidelines For Working With Students With A Same-Sex Orientation
  - Practical Guidelines For Creating A Safe School Environment For Students Of A Same-Sex Orientation
    - Guidelines for Administration
    - Guidelines for Staff
  - Answers To Most Commonly Asked Questions About Same-Sex Orientation
6. Appendix – Theological Foundations
  - Understanding Scripture
    - Homosexuality and Scripture
    - Marriage and Scripture
  - The Natural Law
  - Sin
  - Conscience
  - The Moral Virtues
  - The Call To Chastity And Marriage
  - Scandal
7. Catholic Church Teaching: Resources
  - The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith/Pastoral Care of the Homosexual Person, 1986
  - Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2357, #2358, #2359, #2393, #2394, #2395, #2396
  - CCCB / The Catholic Church’s Teaching on Homosexuality, 1997
  - USCCB / *Always Our Children*, 1997
  - *Reaching Out*, pp. 182-186, OCCB Resource
  - *Turning Points*, pp. 219-220, OCCB Resource
  - Additional Resources





**ONTARIO CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS**  
**CONFERENCE DES EVEQUES CATHOLIQUES DE L'ONTARIO**

August 3, 2004

To: The Catholic Educators of Ontario

Dear Colleagues:

**Re: Pastoral Care of Students with a Same-Sex Orientation**

All of the students who attend Catholic schools deserve to have the best pastoral care that we can give them. Our goal is to help them be formed in the image of Christ, to be full, active members of the Christian community, to hear God's call in their lives and answer it with generosity and courage.

We have not always been sensitive to the particular needs of students with a same-sex orientation. Today, as we consider this reality more closely, we find guidance in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It reminds us that students with a same-sex orientation are called to the virtue of chastity, as are all of God's sons and daughters. The Catechism also calls us to ensure that these students are subject to no unjust discrimination: they have the right to be protected from any physical or psychological harm.

We encourage you to continue your efforts to develop school communities that will help these students – indeed, that will help all students – be formed in the image of Christ, placing before them the value of charity, chastity and Christian hope and sustaining them as they strive to live out these virtues. In achieving these ends, you may need to develop specific policies and procedures to meet special needs.

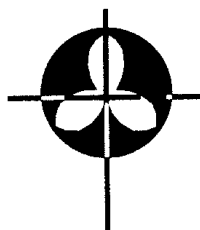
During the past several months, the Education Commission of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops has been involved with several Catholic education associations in an attempt to formulate provincial guidelines with regard to pastoral care for students with a same-sex orientation. The present document is the fruit of that cooperation. I encourage you to participate in the implementation of these guidelines and to share your experience with others so that a set of best practices can be developed.

In undertaking this task, we are together contributing to a clear presentation of the Church's teaching on homosexuality, to a greater integration of the challenge of chastity with a deep sense of personal dignity, to building communities where practices like bullying and unjust discrimination, which are detrimental to all students, have been eliminated. The result should be school communities which are more Catholic in the fullest sense of the word.

Yours sincerely,

Most Rev. Paul-André Durocher  
Chair, OCCB Education Commission





**ONTARIO CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS**  
**CONFERENCE DES EVEQUES CATHOLIQUES DE L'ONTARIO**

March 31, 2003

To: All Involved in Catholic Education

Dear Friends,

*Our purpose in writing this letter is to help you to be clear about the authentic teaching of the Church on sexual morality and in particular in the area of homosexuality.<sup>1</sup>*

*During World Youth Day, the Holy Father said to the young people:*

*“I have heard your festive voices, your cries, your songs and I have felt the deep longing that beats within your hearts: You want to be happy!*

*Dear young people, many and enticing are the voices that call out to you from all sides: Many of these voices speak to you of a joy that can be had with money, with success, with power. Mostly they propose a joy that comes with the superficial and fleeting pleasure of the senses.”*

*As the Pope said: “People are made for happiness.”<sup>2</sup>*

*What then leads to happiness in this difficult and delicate area?*

### **Catholic Schools**

Catholic schools in Ontario have always been recognized as institutional expressions of the Church responsible for the education and formation of the Catholic children entrusted to them by their parents.<sup>3</sup> The Church has a responsibility to teach what it believes to be for the good of each person and for all members of the Catholic Faith.

Parents and local Catholic communities of faith depend on Catholic school boards, trustees, principals, teachers, counsellors and chaplains to transmit faithfully the Church’s moral teachings to their Catholic students, always with charity, gentleness, tact and understanding.

In the case of inappropriate moral conduct the duty of Catholic schools is to guide students into morally acceptable paths.

Permitting behaviour implies that the person in authority and the institution condone it. It is not sound or acceptable practice for Catholic schools to teach that certain behaviour is contrary to Catholic teaching, but then to take no action when it is exhibited openly in a school context. Inaction or indifference causes scandal<sup>4</sup> and could persuade students that the teaching of the Church is not to be taken seriously. Teachers and administrators teach by their actions. Taking action removes an occasion of sin, in the Catholic understanding, both for the ones acting inappropriately and for others and, therefore, is an expression of pastoral care for each individual person and for all members of the group.

### **Teaching Sexual Morality in Catholic Schools**

For Catholics, the Christian vocation<sup>5</sup> is lived within the sacrament of marriage or the sacrament of holy orders or consecrated life or the single life. The virtue of chastity is at the root of sexual morality. This virtue calls all persons, married and unmarried, to respect God's intention for human sexuality and so to honour God in our quest for human fulfilment and happiness.

Chastity<sup>6</sup> is a positive orientation to life. It is to be taught as a discipline of the heart, the eye, of language and all the senses, which frees us to embrace important human goods. Teaching chastity begins from a spiritual intuition that helps us to grasp the obligation inherent in the fact that our body belongs to God. On this point it is St. Paul who reminds us that: "The body is meant...for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (1Cor. 6:13).

In Christian marriage, a man and a woman live out what Pope John Paul II has called "the nuptial meaning of the body". As the Holy Father puts it, "The communion of persons means existing in a mutual 'for', in a relationship of mutual gift." Man and woman, in their complementarity, are a manifestation of the creation of humanity "in the image and likeness of God."<sup>7</sup> Marriage is, in the solid tradition of the Church, the only proper context for sexual relationships and is the way of chastity for married people. It is here alone that the two-fold meaning of sexual intercourse, the unitive and procreative, finds its proper order.<sup>8</sup>

Sexual activity is truly meaningful only when it embodies and expresses marital love, love that is both fully committed and open to life, and it cannot do that outside of marriage for anyone, heterosexual or homosexual. This means that sexual activity which is outside marriage cannot be condoned, and is taught by the Church to be immoral. This includes masturbation, fornication and adultery, and sexual activity with a person of the same sex.

Students in our Catholic schools are still growing up, and marriage is not an imminent prospect. They are called to develop true friendships, marked by genuine love and affection, with members of both sexes. This involves learning to communicate about important things, developing their own gifts and learning to cherish the gifts of others, and engaging in a wide variety of wholesome activities together. This time should also be devoted to discerning the future unfolding of personal vocation.

Sexual activity between unmarried people can undermine such friendships and block vocational discernment. One reason is that sexual activity inevitably tends to become the focus of the relationship, and other activities, despite their great worth, tend to be valued less.

Sexual desire is not in itself sinful. It can, depending on the choices a person makes, be an occasion of growth in virtue or an occasion of sin.

Students need to be taught that their present choices determine their character. If they co-operate with God in making choices, they will be capable of receiving the fulfilment that God wants for them, not only here but hereafter.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Church's Teaching on Homosexuality**

In Catholic education, students should be brought to an understanding of a loving God who gives to them (as to all of us) a dignity beyond our imagining.

It is in this context that the teaching of the Church on the morality of homosexual orientation and homosexual activity is presented, and within the context of moral teaching on sexuality and marriage generally.

The Church's general teaching on homosexuality is summed up in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.<sup>10</sup> An irreversible homosexual orientation is not sinful, since it is not sought by homosexual persons. A tendency, desire or inclination are not choices and are therefore not wrong in themselves. There is a real difference between sexual desire and the decision to act on it. The Church makes a critical distinction between orientation, and conduct or behaviour. The Church clearly teaches that homosexual acts are immoral.<sup>11</sup> Included under homosexual acts are genital sexual activity and erotic relational behaviour with a person of the same sex.

Thus, romantic behaviour between homosexual persons is morally unacceptable, because it points toward future sexual relationships that are non-marital. Romantic behaviour is not confined to a set of defined activities. It is a description of one-to-one relational behaviour which involves sexual attraction. Romantic behaviour is quite different from the behaviour of simple friendship.

### **The Pastoral Care of Students Experiencing Same-Sex Attraction**

Catholic schools and those teaching in Catholic schools should be careful to present the Church's teaching fully. This does not mean that questions should not be explored, but always with the intention of understanding and accepting the teaching.<sup>12</sup>

Students experiencing same-sex attraction should be treated with sensitivity and compassion. Homosexual students, in particular, often have a difficult period of adjustment in recognizing their sexual orientation and its consequences for their lives. Empirical studies show that they are often the victims of verbal, physical and more subtle forms of abuse. Suicide rates among homosexual students are higher than those of their heterosexual peers. Teachers, counsellors and chaplains should be aware of the particular challenges facing homosexual students and should reach out to them with pastoral care.<sup>13</sup> They should also ensure that all members of the school community are aware that the Church teaches that abusive behaviour toward any person, for any reason, is unacceptable and that, in the case of homosexual persons, "every sign of unjust

discrimination in their regard should be avoided.”<sup>14</sup> The school should enforce clear policies against any form of harassment.

Adolescent students are not always the best judges of their own sexual orientation. When a student discloses a same-sex attraction, it does not necessarily mean that the student is homosexual. Teachers and others entrusted with the pastoral care of students experiencing same-sex attraction should also keep in mind the different stages in a student’s life and his or her ability to absorb teaching.

The often negative impact of the media on sexual morality generally should not be underestimated. The student may be poorly instructed in his or her faith, may not be particularly devout or regular in religious practice, including prayer and sacraments, and may be influenced by the sexual permissiveness of the general culture. Recall the Holy Father’s words: “Many of these voices... propose a joy that comes with the superficial and fleeting pleasure of the senses”.

While the Church respects an individual who has done his or her best to come to a correct moral judgment, it is not obligated to accommodate a decision based on an individual’s erroneous conscience. This includes a student who blamelessly arrives at the mistaken conclusion that homosexual acts can be morally good. There is an objective truth concerning moral issues; and error, even when blameless, does not change the nature of this truth.

Teachers and others should try to lead the homosexual student to a progressively better sexual morality without condemnation and with much patience. The steady progression of moral and spiritual conversion is the goal, even when there seem to be more failures than successes, more stalling than movement. There are no quick solutions to most human problems. Yet all of us have the freedom to act morally even in the face of great temptation: we are not the product of our desires.

For most young people, romantic attachments and behaviour are part and parcel of their blossoming sexuality and their growth toward the commitment of marriage. Romantic attachments and behaviour are fully expected of heterosexual couples. Behaviour such as holding hands, embracing, kissing, dating and dancing that are romantically intended are all acceptable within appropriate limits.

It will be especially difficult for young persons who are experiencing homosexual romantic yearnings to understand and accept this teaching of the Church since it discourages romantic behaviour that would be acceptable in a heterosexual context. The role of pastoral care in this effort is critical. A person exercising pastoral care is called to understand the particular strengths and weaknesses of each unique student in order to assess his or her moral capabilities at any given time; what can and should be the next step in this person’s journey toward chastity.

Pastoral care is marked by concern, warmth, love, compassion and sensitivity. It does not, however, encourage or condone, even temporarily, objectively immoral conduct out of misplaced compassion, since doing so would be to mislead the student gravely.

## Teachers, Counsellors and Chaplains

*Dear Friends: We share responsibility for bringing the truth of the Gospel to our young people, including young homosexual students who are struggling with self identity and self worth. You are called to have a sense of your own integrity as teachers of Catholic morality. You are called to follow the example of Christ himself in the patience, care and love you show to these students.*

*In the hectic and complex life of a school, issues of sexuality and homosexual orientation arise in many diverse circumstances and guises. Handling these issues in an authentic, appropriate and compassionate fashion is a demanding task. We invite you and others in the Catholic community, including students, into a conversation about the appropriate means to achieve full and genuine Catholic formation in these matters for our students.*

*The Holy Father spoke of the enormous desire of the young to be happy. His message and the message that all of us engaged in Catholic education must never tire of setting before the young people entrusted to us is this:*

*"People are made for happiness. Rightly, then, you thirst for happiness. Christ has the answer to this desire of yours. But he asks you to trust him. True joy is a victory, something which cannot be obtained without a long and difficult struggle. Christ holds the secret of this victory".<sup>15</sup>*

*By walking always with Christ, even when the path is uphill, we can achieve joy.*

Issued by the Education Commission

Of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops

March 31, 2003

1. The controversy leading up to and resulting from the interim decision of the Ontario Superior Court in the case of *Marc Hall v. The Durham Catholic District School Board*, showed that this pastoral instruction is opportune.
2. Pope John Paul II/World Youth Day, "The Beatitudes: Portrait of Jesus, Portrait of a Disciple" (2002), 32 *Origins*, No. 11, page 184.
3. The Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, *This Moment of Promise*, (1989) p. 16

"Given the increasing fragility of families and the over-extension of parishes, it is becoming more obvious that the school, for some, is often the primary place where young people experience the Church as an alternative community which is shaped more by faith, hope and love than by the values of our consumer culture.

In this situation, those involved in Catholic education have an awesome privilege and responsibility. They are called not only to create an authentic faith community in the school but

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also to bring that community into communion with the parish and the wider Church community. ...Students deserve to discover their vocation in the universal Church and their roots in the long tradition of the Church.

While we are called to be constructive and creative in our contribution to society, we must also be critical of those aspects of our culture which are contrary to the values of our faith tradition”.

4. The Catechism states:

2284. Scandal is an attitude or behaviour which leads another to do evil. The person who gives scandal becomes his neighbour's temptor. He damages virtue and integrity; he may even draw his brother into spiritual death. Scandal is a grave offence if by deed or omission another is deliberately led into a grave offence.

See also sections 2285, 2286, 2287

5. The Catechism states:

2461. True development concerns the whole man. It is concerned with increasing each person's ability to respond to his vocation and hence to God's call.

543. Everyone is called to enter the kingdom. First announced to the children of Israel, this messianic kingdom is intended to accept men of all nations. To enter it, one must first accept Jesus' word: The word of the Lord is compared to a seed which is sown in a field; those who hear it with faith and are numbered among the little flock of Christ have truly received the kingdom. Then, by its own power, the seed sprouts and grows until the harvest (Luke 12: 32).

6. The Catechism states:

2345. Chastity is a moral virtue. The Christian has 'put on Christ', the model for all chastity. All Christ's faithful are called to lead a chaste life in keeping with their particular states of life. At the moment of his Baptism, the Christian is pledged to lead his affective life in chastity.

See also Sections 2346, 2347, 2348, 2349, 2350 and 2357-9.

7. \*\*Ref. "General Audience", 9 January 1980,

[[http://www.Vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/audiences/catechesis\\_genesis/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud-19800109\\_en.html](http://www.Vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/catechesis_genesis/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud-19800109_en.html)] and *The Original Unity of Man and Woman* [book ref.]

8. The unitive aspect of sexual intercourse refers to its capability to build up the love relationship between husband and wife. It embraces the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual nature of the couple. The procreative aspect refers to its movement towards begetting children, the fruit of the couple's mutual love.

9. Gaudium et spes no. 39, The Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher (New York: America, 1966) "...after we have obeyed the Lord, and in his Spirit nurtured on earth the values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom, and indeed all the good fruits of our nature and freedom, and indeed all the good fruits of our nature and enterprise, we will find them again, but freed of stain, burnished and transfigured. This will be so when Christ hands over to the Father a kingdom eternal and universal: 'a kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace'".

10. Catechism of the Catholic Church

2357. Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or

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predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.

Also see Sections 2358, 2359, 2396.

11. The technical theological expression is that “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered”. This does not mean that these acts are indicative of a mental or physical disorder, but that the acts are not consistent with the created order. That order requires that human sexual activity occur only within marriage for the reasons expressed elsewhere in this document. Cf. Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona Humana*, 1975.
12. Criticism that denigrates the teaching should be avoided.
13. Our Pastor is the Good Shepherd. Each of us needs to be attentive to our limitations. Teachers and counsellors are not pastors, but they are called to provide pastoral care. On occasion, they will need the assistance of pastors and other professionals. Sometimes the most appropriate response will be to refer a student to a pastor or to professional counsellors, psychologists or psychiatrists.
14. Catechism of the Catholic Church  
2358. The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.
15. See footnote 2.



## INTRODUCTION

### **Purpose**

At the request of the Education Commission of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, building upon their letter to Catholic educators, a team of Catholic educators developed this pastoral guideline for assisting students with a same-sex attraction. It is written to support school personnel in making Catholic school communities safe and nurturing for all students in their care.

“In this situation, those involved in Catholic education have an awesome privilege and responsibility. They are called not only to create an authentic faith community in the school but also to bring that community into communion with the parish and the wider Church community. ...Students deserve to discover their vocation in the universal Church and their roots in the long tradition of the Church.”

*This Moment of Promise*, OCCB (1989), p.16

St. Paul wrote, the body of Christ “does not consist of one member, but of many.” In order to be healthy, the church needs all of its members – especially those who feel in any way marginalized. As the Ontario Catholic bishops state:

“The Church has a responsibility to teach what it believes to be for the good of each person and for all members of the Catholic Faith.”

OCCB Letter to All Involved in Catholic Education, March 31, 2003

### **Role of Catholic Schools**

Catholic schools have always been recognized as institutional expressions of the church, responsible for the education and formation of the Catholic children entrusted to them by their parents.<sup>1</sup> If the mission of both church and school, as Pope John Paul II suggests, is to build a civilization of love, all who work in Catholic schools have a clear obligation to transmit the church’s moral teaching faithfully, while creating for their students the lived experience of God’s welcome, care and unconditional love.

Catholic schools provide educational opportunity within the context of a faith community which must clearly be seen to recognize that each individual is made in the image and likeness of God, to affirm the essential dignity, value and rights of the human person, and to model the gospel values of faith, hope and love to each and every student entrusted to their care. In part, the mission of the Catholic school is to create the lived experience of what it is like to be welcomed, cared for, loved without conditions, included, and taught values that students can commit to and find sustenance throughout their adult life.

Catholic schools should consciously create an environment where students who feel marginalized, rejected, or vulnerable can experience safe, nurturing inclusive communities of

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<sup>1</sup>OCCB. *This Moment of Promise*. 1989, p.16.

faith. Such communities support and assist them in their journey towards holiness and wholeness.

### **Building Safe, Nurturing, Inclusive Communities**

As publicly funded institutions, Ontario Catholic schools have a legal obligation to provide equal access to education and equal protection under the law for all students. Catholic schools, and Catholic school boards must ensure that legislation, including legal requirements addressing professional responsibility, issues of confidentiality and the protection of privacy, are adhered to in board policy and school practice. The right of each student to be free of harassment, violence or malice in speech or in action is unequivocal, and schools carry the clear obligation to provide a positive school environment for all students and staff. As faith-based communities, Catholic schools carry an even more compelling obligation to protect the most marginalized within their care.

Pope John Paul II's call to build a "civilization of love" is realized in caring. The theology and spirituality of communion provides a useful context to inform and to guide the ministry of those called to provide pastoral care for students experiencing same-sex attractions. In the apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Inuente*, Pope John Paul II articulates this spirituality of communion:

*To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings.*

*But what does this mean in practice? Here too, our thought could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle in education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up.*

*A spirituality of communion indicates above all, the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us.*

*A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of brothers and sisters in faith within a profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are a part of me". This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desire and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship.*

*A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me".*

*A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to “make room” for our brothers and sisters, bearing “each other’s burdens” and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.*

These words offer a theology of solidarity, common good and stewardship which lies at the very heart of community in Catholic schools, and which can serve as a centrepiece of apostolic ministry to students experiencing same-sex attraction.

### **Invitation to Personal Reflection**

As one who is preparing to provide pastoral care to gay and lesbian students, it is important to reflect on your own life experiences with human sexuality in order to identify any social biases you may have. For that reason as you begin to explore the pages of this pastoral resource, you may find it beneficial to reflect on the following questions:

1. What is your own experience of respectful and honest conversations about human sexuality?  
About homosexuality?  
In what settings has this kind of discussion been welcomed?  
In what settings has it proved to be useful?
2. When you reflect on your own family and friends, the people you work and socialize with, who among them do you know to be struggling with homosexuality?  
What have you learned—about sexuality, about love, about fidelity, about faith—from the gay people who are close to you?  
If you are lesbian or gay yourself, with whom in the community of faith have you been able to share this dimension of your life?
3. In your experience what is most challenging in a discussion about homosexuality?  
What benefits, if any, have you experienced from discussions of human sexuality in the context of faith?

Great care has been taken to ensure that this pastoral resource remains true to the Catholic faith tradition and its moral teaching. At the same time, it seeks to bring life to the fullest for all who are touched by its content.

### **The Path to Holiness: Called to Chastity, Intimacy and Wholeness**

In Baptism, we enter into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit. As such, in baptism all of us are called to pursue holiness, and wholeness as we pursue the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity.

To achieve wholeness is to accept that we are fully human. That humans need food, sleep, protection from the elements – that humans prosper in freedom and a sense of personal control

over their lives – that a reality-based sense of self-esteem is essential to human happiness are all, today, “unarguable”. So too is the fact that humans are essentially relational and that we require an awareness of being loved, of loving another, and a sense of a belonging connectedness to something greater than our isolated self.

People who are connected to others in deep interpersonal relationships are less at risk for both physical and emotional disease and experience significantly greater levels of personal happiness and life-satisfaction. On the other hand, a common complaint heard from the physically and emotionally challenged is that of feeling emotionally isolated, lonely, disconnected, uncared about, and marginalized. At the heart of this complaint is the belief that one’s life has no meaning or purpose. But meaning and purpose are always found in our relationships with others. Power, prestige and material goods cannot bring us happiness. Knowing that my life has value and significance that transcends self gratification brings peace. Our call as Christian men and women is to an intimacy with God, an intimacy that is not exclusive but rather inclusive of others both in general and individually.

Being open to forming and sustaining mutual intimate relationships is the ultimate task of full adulthood. Without it we fail to be fully adult. Our social friends make our life richer, fuller, and more enjoyable; our intimate friends bring us to a deeper level of self-transcendence that is experienced in the commitment of love. No matter if our sexual gender identity is identical to our biological identity or not, whether our sexual orientation is toward our own gender or not, or whether our erotic attractions are strong or weak, our need to form and sustain intimate relationships is still present and we have both the right and responsibility to meet them. The challenge is not to avoid intimacy, it is to embrace it and find its expression in ways that do not compromise those values by which we are called to live our lives. As choosing marriage is a way of expressing intimate love, so too is celibacy, or living one’s life singly. Being celibate, married, or single is never a way of avoiding intimacy, but rather a way of giving it a visible expressive witness. To physically “make love” to another can be an expression of an intimacy that already exists, but it is not intimacy itself. To make intimacy synonymous with “having sex” is both confusing and misleading. Often our most intimate relationships will have no erotic dimension and many married people discover their deepest intimate moments are other than their physical love-making. As Christians we believe that each of us is called to live chastely, whether married, single, celibate, widowed or divorced. Our faith tradition calls us to integrate chastity and intimacy in our pursuit of wholeness.

Mindful that each person’s fundamental identity transcends sexual orientation, those who provide pastoral care within our schools to students with same-sex orientation are called to affirm that all persons share the right to freedom, happiness and dignity within the context of the Church’s teaching on homosexuality and are called to live fully as God’s children within a safe, nurturing and welcoming community. It is through our shared commitment to the development of such a community that the “civilization of love”<sup>2</sup> is one step closer to realization.

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<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, 1995.

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# **PERSONAL STORIES**

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## PERSONAL STORIES

### NO ONE BY MY SIDE

It was very difficult being a student with same-sex attractions, both in elementary and secondary schools.

Let me start by stating that from a very early age (either 12 or 13) I was attracted to other boys. Not once did I ever experience sexual attraction toward a girl.

My first experience of homosexual discrimination occurred, I believe, in the eighth grade. There was a very attractive boy in my classroom that I had a crush on and admired secretly for quite some time. He and I were never friends, but I do remember, on one occasion, play-fighting with him during break. I was so thrilled to be playing with him that I wasn't aware of the sparkle in my eyes and the excessive broad smile on my face.

He noticed it, however, and immediately he stopped playing with me. "FAG!" he said. "Don't look at me like that! You're a fag." He then turned around and left me, and that was the end of that. This experience was very painful for me. His words made me feel like I didn't belong with the other boys, especially in the playground during breaks. I began to feel different from others and felt very unaccepted.

From this point onward, I realized I had to be extra careful. I always had to make sure others weren't looking at me whenever I gazed at attractive boys, male teenagers, and older males. Although this also applied to family members and friends, the school setting was my major concern. The reason being was that there was a plethora of attractive male students which made it difficult for me to keep my eyes from admiring their good looks. School, of course, was also the place where I spent most of the day. Thereby, the chance of students discovering my secret was quite high.

I felt most conscious and paranoid about being discovered during gym, especially in the changing room, for obvious reasons. Once in a while I'd hear the words "fag" and "gay" used in a discriminatory and mean way. Because of this, I frequently kept my gaze on the floor while changing. I felt like I was living in prison, always hiding, always monitoring my eyes so no one would see me looking at other males.

Then came high school, grade 11, the time when I experienced the greatest emotional pain and rejection. I overheard my best friend telling a couple of students that I was "gay". Because I loved him and was sexually attracted to him for at least one year, the betrayal destroyed my trust in all people. This included other friends and even my own family. I asked myself, "If I cannot trust my very best friend, whom then can I trust?" Three or so weeks later, I experienced further turmoil. I noticed many students in my grade ignoring me and some giving me dirty looks. Luckily, it didn't go beyond that.

This happened in the mid 1980's, when HIV and AIDS news was all over the media. I believe it was because of this that I experienced such great discrimination and rejection. Only one friend

stayed with me after I ended my friendship with my best friend. I was terribly alone for the remainder of the school year.

By the time I learned of *Courage* (age 23), I had already finished high school. Why didn't a *Courage* or similar group exist in the school? Why wasn't there Catholic support for me when I needed it most—when I was young, when I had virtually no friends? This I do not know.

In high school, I wanted to also have friends of the same orientation. Friends I could relate to. However, I didn't want so-called "friends" who would take me to spiritually unhealthy places, such as gay bars, clubs, etc. I had decided at the age of 14 that I wanted to live a chaste life, after learning of God's teaching on same-sex sexual behaviour.

Fortunately for me, I now have such good friends. Thanks to *Courage*. Thanks to our good Lord and Mother Mary who led me there. I am now quite happy with my life as a person who has same-sex attractions.

By a Member of *Courage*, Toronto, ON

**Note:**

*Courage*, an apostolate of the Roman Catholic Church, ministers to those with same-sex attractions and their loved ones. It has been endorsed by the Pontifical Council for the Family. Now with more than 95 Chapters world wide, *Courage* has become a mainstream Catholic Apostolate helping thousands of men and women find peace through fellowship, prayer and the Sacraments. Individual chapters, such as those in Ontario, are self-supporting and exist with the permission of their diocesan Bishop.

## MICHAEL'S STORY

As I reflect upon my experience in a Catholic high school, I realize that it has been a time of great discovery for me. During my high school years, I've discovered my potential to learn, to thrive, and to contribute to the vibrant school spirit here. I have enjoyed being involved in school activities.

Some of the extra-curricular activities I took part in were the music ministry at school liturgies, and the World Youth Day committee. Over the last four years, I have enjoyed attending the annual 24 Hour Fast-for-Life and Soiree International, a festival of international foods and entertainment. Also, I have discovered my own talent for song writing and I am the lead vocalist in a local rock band.

Relationships; now those were something else! They were a "larger than life" factor in my high school years. In grade nine, I started off with my only friends from elementary school and the eight of us would gather in the hall in the morning opposite the library and talk about life in general. The choice of topic was usually the media and television and our own relationships. Eventually our group expanded to about thirty.

This began to change over the next year or so and now in grade twelve I find myself hanging out, day in and day out, with just a few close friends. My best friends Kevin, Sam, Matt and Calvin help to make my high school life more bearable when I'm struggling with problems with relationships, with school, and with the nonsense attitudes of some of my other peers.

As for my "a little more than friends" relationships, they used to be a hassle. My very first relationship resulted in my very first love. Jennifer was her name and she was not exactly the apple in anyone's eye except mine at the time. Over the last few years I have had a number of girlfriends and a steady girlfriend for about two years, but things began to change about eight months ago, in the fall of 2003. I began to question my sexuality and found myself also being attracted physically and emotionally to male peers. It took months to realize that I had become a "not-so-typical teenage adolescent", for during that period of time I had discovered that I was bisexual. Telling my friends was one of the most difficult things, emotionally, I have ever done. What if they leave my side? What if they look at me any different, not as a friend but a stranger? What if they feel uncomfortable around me and refuse to help me when I need it? What if I no longer have someone by my side to talk to when I need guidance, when my light is blocked?

I finally found the courage to tell my girlfriend and her response was, "Hon, this is just a chemical imbalance in your brain, we can get pills to fix you." These are the words that came from the girl I could imagine marrying one day. The girl who expressed her love to me through means of those three little words everyone longs to hear from another... "I love you" ... and all I could think to myself in that moment was another three little words, "I am alone." Two years we had been together and she responded like that! I knew I could never look at her the same way. Shortly after we broke up.

That was a real shot to my ego and it took me a long time before I was able to disclose my orientation to my best friend Kevin. I shouldn't have worried as, surprisingly, he thought

nothing of it. Matt and the others did not take it so lightly but are at least trying to be understanding. I had misgivings about being so open in school about my sexual orientation but nevertheless all of my friends found out some way or another. It did not seem to bother the girls, but it did bother the guys and because of that, I lost respect for them and in some cases ended the friendships. My current girlfriend Lisa is aware and we have been dating for four months.

I continued to keep my family out of the loop until recently when I confessed to my mother that I thought I was bi-sexual. She was startled but promised that she would not yet tell my father who is prejudiced against gays.

I found a place of refuge and support in the Chaplain's office at my high school. She showed me through her guidance that we are all made in God's own image and that each one of us is put here for a purpose in life to do God's will no matter what our cultural background, colour, or sexual orientation might be. Nevertheless, I struggle with the church and its views on homosexuality. A recent retreat I went on was helpful because it was on the theme of the Good Samaritan and challenged us to see everyone as our neighbour, including the homeless, the poor, and sexual minorities. Prayer in our school also helps me to be at peace and to know we are all loved by God.

What gives me hope is knowing that there are people like my Chaplain at school and friends like Kevin out there. I hope some day that each and every person can have a little bit of Kevin or my Chaplain in them and that they all may see that we are all brothers and sisters together in unity.

*Michael attends an Ontario Catholic High School*

## TAKE TIME TO DISCOVER

Dear young people, I wanted to share my story with you, as hard as it is to tell, because so many young people today are making very harmful decisions about their sexuality. I am hoping that my experience will help you to work through some of your own feelings and experiences and give you the peace I have found. When I was in high school, something happened to me that changed my life forever. This is my story.

Growing up is never an easy thing to do but when you are shy and an outsider, life can seem overwhelming. My father worked for the railway and so we moved often. That's O.K. when you're a kid but not when you're a teenager. When I was 14, we moved to a large city in Ontario and I was registered in a beautiful, new Catholic secondary school. I was so excited I could hardly wait; however, the first day was a nightmare. Everyone ignored me. I was the new kid on the block and a small-town girl with 'no class'. On top of that, I was short and a little overweight. My family was poor and I often wore my sister's hand-me-downs. For weeks I felt so alone and miserable. Then I met Anna, also a new student. Anna was not like the others. She befriended me when others would not. We did everything together. We joined the swim club together, went out to movies together, and shared our lunch in the cafeteria together. But most importantly we shared our hurts and disappointment, our victories and defeats, our joys and aspirations. We were best friends.

One evening after studying for a math test, we decided to watch a movie. As we sat together on the couch, Anna began to look at me in a strange, new way. She told me she loved me. At first I thought she was just fooling around. But then she got a little angry and said she was serious about the way she felt. I was uncomfortable at first, but as she continued to tell me about her feeling for me, I began to feel a deep compassion for her. Anna put her arms around me and kissed me and I didn't resist. I very rarely ever got hugged even at home, and for one fleeting moment, this new sensation really felt wonderful. Nothing else happened, just that hug and that kiss. It almost seemed natural but when it was over something deep inside of me recoiled, so I quickly found an excuse to say goodnight and left.

Later at home, the realization of what had just happened began to take hold of me. I began to think about what that kiss really meant. Was Anna a lesbian? Why was that kiss not unpleasant? Could I be a lesbian? Was I really attracted to Anna and not to boys? Boys didn't seem to be attracted to me and I really didn't have a crush on any of them. I wasn't really very interested in sex at all, at least not like the other girls in our class. I was most happy when I was just hanging around with Anna. The more I thought about it, the more I began to believe that I was gay.

Whatever the answers to those questions, I soon began to realize that what had happened was enough to change our friendship forever. When I saw Anna for the first time after that evening, a feeling of shame took hold of me. I spoke very briefly to her, made some awkward excuse and turned to leave. She called after me, but I pretended I didn't hear her and ran off as if in a hurry to get somewhere. For days I avoided Anna, trying to forget what had happened yet haunted by the possibility that she might tell someone else about our encounter. What if the others started to talk about me behind my back or even worse teased me in front of the others? What if I became the topic of their whispering and the brunt of their jokes? I knew how the other students felt

about homosexuals. I had seen them physically abuse one of the grade 11 students who had “come out”.

The worst part was not having Anna for a friend any more. I really missed her. I guess I really did love her. Sometimes she would approach me and ask what was wrong and I would dig deep inside to find any reason possible to excuse my behaviour. Finally Anna quit trying and I found myself totally alone again and still filled with the questions of my sexual orientation. Sometimes I thought I heard the other kids talking about me and Anna and I wondered if Anna had told them I was gay. School became a very difficult place to be – a place of fear. Soon my schoolwork began to fail and I began skipping classes. School was the last place I wanted to be.

One day, the principal of the school called me into her office to find out why my grades were falling. I could only tell her that I had a lot of things on my mind and I would try harder in the future. Obviously she was not satisfied with that response but in her wisdom she decided to try one more thing before calling home. She asked me if I would like to speak to the chaplain about my problems. I said yes, not because I wanted to talk to him but because I thought it might keep her from calling my parents. It worked but she made the condition that I see him at least once a week and that my grades begin to show some immediate improvement. I agreed and left her office.

That’s where Fr. Pat came into the story. At first, I just sat in his office and shrugged my shoulders when he tried to talk to me. Then one day he told me a joke in the hall and I laughed so hard I forgot to be silent. The next time we met in his office, he asked me to help him with the upcoming Mass and so it continued until one day I realized he was my friend. It took me a little while to trust him completely, but once I knew he wouldn’t tell anyone else, I began to open up. I began by asking him questions about sexual feelings and then about homosexual feelings. Finally I was able to let go of my shame and tell him about the events of that night and all my fears. And through all of it he just listened and looked lovingly at my face.

Fr. Pat spoke to me every day after that, sometimes just to say hello and other times in his office about how I was feeling and what was happening. Although he rarely spoke about the Church’s teachings on homosexuality, he did tell me over and over again that my sexual feelings are only a small part of who I am. He helped me to see that I had a lot to offer others. Life was so much more than sex, and the intimacy between friends could be as life-giving as the sexual intimacy between husband and wife. More than anything else he wanted me to know that God loved me – loved me no matter what my orientation. He advised me not to be in a hurry to make up my mind about my orientation, and to have fun growing up. “And in the end,” he stated, “if you do discover you are gay, God will be there beside you all through your life helping you to make the right decisions. Never stop praying,” he told me. “You are never alone as long as you have your faith.” At first I just shrugged those promises off but he told me over and over again until eventually I began to see that he was right. It was prayer and the love of Fr. Pat that got me through those years at secondary.

I don’t want it to sound like it was easy, it wasn’t. There were times when the other students made hurtful remarks about being gay and even though they never confirmed that they thought I was gay, I felt they were talking about me. And then there was Anna; I still had to deal with our

friendship and my feeling for her. It was impossible for us to pick up where we left off. She wanted us to become a couple and I didn't. I didn't know what I wanted, but I wasn't ready to tell others I was gay. I never had a lot of friends like some of the other students but I did meet some kids I could hang out with at school through one of the clubs Fr. Pat encouraged me to join. I think what bothered me the most was the fact that, aside from Fr. Pat, I never again had a really close friend like Anna with whom I could so freely share my feelings. I always felt that I betrayed her but I did not know how to be "just friends" with her again.

I cannot end this story without telling you something else about my years in secondary. Fr. Pat never emphasized the teaching of the Catholic Church in our sessions, but my religion teachers did. I learned a great deal about human sexuality and faith from my religion teachers, but the one I remember most was my grade ten teacher. She was always sensitive and respectful when she talked about the church's teaching on human sexuality. When discussing homosexuality, she was honest about the struggles that a same-sex orientation can present to a person and their family, but at the same time she told us that a homosexual lifestyle was destructive both to the persons involved and to society. What I appreciated most was her passion for justice and her claim that justice demands respect and compassion for those who experience a homosexual orientation. I know that being in a Catholic school helped me to make the most important decision of my life – to try and live a chaste life, no matter what my orientation. I am glad I made that decision. As for my parents and the principal, they never knew the story, but I hope and believe they would have understood – if I had been brave enough to tell them.

It has taken a long time for me to discover who I really am and to make sense of that night so long ago. As painful as the journey was, it would have been a lot worse if I had not had Fr. Pat and my faith to accompany me on that journey. Today, I can still remember the pain and confusion of those years but I can also remember everything Fr. Pat and the teachers taught me. I will be forever grateful for how they guided me through those formative years as I was discovering my sexuality. I guess I was one of the lucky ones.

I was 19 before I let go of the idea that I was gay. I was 21 when I dated my first boy friend and 26 when I got married. Next month I will have my first child, and when he asks me about being gay, I will hold him in my arms and tell him my story.



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# **PASTORAL PRACTICES**

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## GENERAL GUIDELINES

As guidance counsellors, chaplains, pastors, and Catholic educators what do you need in order to apply prudent pastoral practice to youth and young adolescents?

One should possess the following:

- an appreciation of the values of home, forgiveness, humility, conversion, and spiritual growth in the way of the Lord;
- respect for the dignity of persons with same-sex orientation;
- an understanding of the Church's teaching on human sexuality and marriage;
- an appreciation for the Catholic Church's interpretation of scripture (see Appendix, page 28);
- an appreciation for the natural law, conscience and conscience formation, sin, moral virtues and scandal as applied in Catholic ethics and moral theology;
- an understanding of the emotional, physical, social, spiritual and sexual development of adolescents;
- a knowledge of the content in Family Life Programs used within Catholic schools.

The prudent counsellor remembers that the person whom they are assisting is a unique individual made in the image and likeness of God. The process of assimilation into Christ is also unique and different for each individual.

## **PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH A SAME-SEX ORIENTATION**

In general, students with a same-sex orientation want what all students want; to be listened to and cared for. Here are some suggestions if a student discloses to you or needs to discuss same-sex concerns with you.

- Familiarize yourself with Catholic teaching on human sexuality.
- Examine your own attitudes and get access to accurate information about same-sex orientation.
- Be aware that the student feels trust toward you, so don't overreact or act surprised.
- Provide a safe place to discuss the concerns of the student.
- Listen calmly and offer non-judgmental responses that will encourage further dialogue, for example: "tell me what you are concerned about" ... "how does that make you feel?" ...
- Be aware that the student may be experiencing grief reactions such as loss, sadness, anger, denial, or confusion because of negative attitudes of society toward people with a same-sex orientation.
- Don't put words in their mouths. Allow youth to define their own issues. Our role is to help them deal with the issues *they* present. If a supportive environment is provided, youth who would like to talk about issues of sexual orientation will know that it is permissible.
- Use the vocabulary that the student uses. If the student uses "homosexual" or "lesbian/gay" follow her or his lead. Use the term "same-sex feeling" if the student appears uneasy with other vocabulary. For example, "so, you are concerned about your same-sex feelings for other girls".
- A student may appear confused about their orientation. Assure them that this is normal and that it will become more clear as time goes on.
- Be aware of your own comfort level and limitations. Your role is to be a good listener and let the student do the talking.
- Ask yourself and the student:
  1. Does the student have friends he or she can trust with the information?
  2. Do the student's parents know? What would happen if they knew?
  3. If the parents cannot support the student, are there other adults available for support?

- Assure them of confidentiality except where you are required by law to disclose information. Some also include in this ground rule that they will not be able to maintain confidentiality if what is shared is illegal or dangerous to the student or others.
- Offer to continue to meet with the student if they so wish, unless you feel you wish to refer them to someone else. In that case, ask the student if they would allow you to refer them. Once again, it is important for the student's self-esteem and safety that they take the lead in this regard and give you permission to refer them. This also reinforces confidentiality.
- Compliment them on their courage in dealing with the difficult task of self-discovery. God's love is revealed through people who care about one another and help each other grow into the fullness of life.

## **PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR CREATING A SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS OF A SAME-SEX ORIENTATION**

Since 1994, Ontario school boards, under the Ministry of Education's Violence-Free Schools Policy have been required to have policies that contribute to safe, welcoming, violence-free school environments. Sexual, as well as physical, verbal or psychological abuse, bullying and discrimination are unacceptable. Same-sex harassment is a form of sexual harassment.

As Catholic learning communities, we are called to follow in the footsteps of Christ, and see him among us. "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matthew 25:35)

### **Guidelines for Administration**

- Familiarize yourself with Catholic teaching on human sexuality.
- Examine your own attitudes and get access to accurate information about same-sex orientation.
- Actively promote a welcoming, safe environment rooted in gospel values of love, justice, and compassion.
- Do not tolerate derogatory remarks or jokes, name-calling or harassment in the school, and act immediately when this happens, with the necessary and appropriate disciplinary response.
- Be involved in working for school-wide support and education for understanding and tolerance of sexual minorities. There is a need for appropriate Catholic curriculum materials and library resources that broaden the awareness of positive role models in this regard among writers, historians, scientists, artists, musicians, and spiritual leaders.
- Provide grade level assemblies to address zero tolerance for discrimination of any kind as outlined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental/physical abilities) and be sure to include sexual orientation.
- Under the direction of the principal, identify a few staff members who can offer support and/or counsel sexual minority students.
- Provide information sessions for parents regarding a Catholic approach to homosexuality.
- Ensure that all teachers are adequately supported in order to teach the curriculum on human sexuality, including homosexuality. Provide them with opportunities for in-service and the necessary resources both human and material.
- If you are uncomfortable dealing with issues of homosexuality, guide students to others on staff who can provide pastoral care (e.g. chaplain, guidance counsellor).

- At the Catholic school board level, work to develop a policy with respect to assisting students of same-sex orientation in partnership with the Bishop of the Catholic diocese.

### **Guidelines for Staff**

- Make it clear that harassment of and discrimination against students with a same-sex orientation will not be tolerated in staff rooms, classrooms, in hallways, or anywhere on school property. Respect the confidentiality of students.
- Ensure that the required lessons on homosexuality, chastity, and sexual morality outlined in educational curriculum documents for your grade are taught well. If you are uncomfortable with, or not knowledgeable about the topic, seek help from department heads, board consultants and/or administration. Attend in-services/workshops that will help you to become more comfortable and knowledgeable.
- Inform yourself about the needs of and resources for students.
- Do not assume that all students or their parents are heterosexual. Use inclusive language when referring to this relationship.
- Do not apply labels to students such as homosexual, gay, or lesbian.
- During classroom discussions do not suggest that a youth should disclose their same-sex orientation to parents, family and friends. They need to do that at their own safe pace. Many students who reveal their same-sex orientation to their parents are forced to leave home. The decision to tell their parents must be their choice and they must be ready to live with the consequences.

## ANSWERS TO MOST COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SAME-SEX ORIENTATION

### 1. **What is heterosexuality?**

Heterosexuality is experiencing an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction towards persons of the opposite sex.

### 2. **What is bisexuality?**

Bisexuality is experiencing sexual attraction towards persons of the same sex and of the opposite sex.

### 3. **What is Homosexuality?**

Homosexuality is experiencing an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction towards persons of the same sex.

### 4. **What is meant by transgender?**

A person whose gender identity (feeling of being either male or female) does not match their physical/anatomical sex. Some describe it as being born into a wrong body.

### 5. **What is homophobia?**

Homophobia is a strong negative attitude toward homosexuals and homosexuality. It takes many forms: fear of associating with homosexuals, an irrational fear of being considered a homosexual, violent dislike or hatred of homosexual persons, vulgar and abusive language and jokes about homosexuals, condemnation, discrimination, persecution, and even murder of homosexuals. Unlike homosexuality, homophobia can be “cured” through education, experience, reflection and prayer.

Sometimes homophobia exhibits itself in silence. When no mention is made from time to time that there are people of same-sex orientation in every population, silence can be perceived as compliance to continue discrimination.

It should not be assumed, however, that to guide others away from the practice of homosexual genital activity comes out of homophobia. The Church, out of her deep love and compassion for those who struggle with homosexuality “has a responsibility to teach what it believes to be for the good of each person and for all members of the Catholic Faith.”

*OCCB Letter to All Involved in Catholic Education, March 31, 2003*

**6. Why is the label homosexual problematic?**

Homosexual is a label that has been given to individuals who experience a same-sex orientation. This is distinct from same-sex attraction which can be experienced also by heterosexuals. In general, men are referred to as gay and women as lesbian. Attaching a label to the person implies that they are their orientation. Every person has a full range of inter-personal elements that together constitute their identity. For that reason, the label of homosexual should be avoided when discussing the person who expresses a same-sex orientation. The orientation or act is homosexual or heterosexual but the person is not.

**7. Why do some people experience a same-sex orientation?**

There seems to be no single, clear understanding of the origins of same-sex orientation. A common opinion of experts is that there are multiple factors – genetic, hormonal, psychological – that may give rise to it. Generally, it is experienced as a given. “Sexual orientation is discovered, not freely chosen” (Catechism of the Catholic Church #2357-58). By itself, therefore same-sex orientation cannot be considered sinful, for morality presumes the freedom to choose.

**8. Is there an age at which sexual orientation is determined?**

Adolescents may be encouraged to accept homosexuality prematurely when it is more of a developmental issue for them and phase appropriate. Adolescents are in the process of discovering their sexual identities, and a homosexual inclination may be quite normal when it occurs only for a period of time and is not firmly fixed. Adolescents need to be given time and often need some skilful questioning to help them determine more accurately the nature of their homosexual interest. Again, a similar situation can exist for older adults who have a delayed psychosexual development and need to be treated as adolescents even though they are much older chronologically.<sup>1</sup>

**9. Are there physical indicators associated with same-sex orientation?**

Those with same-sex orientation are as different from one another as are those of opposite-sex orientation. There is no such thing as a typical gay man or lesbian woman.

**10. Are there problems associated with a same-sex orientation?**

Becoming aware of a same-sex orientation often carries with it feelings of fear, mistrust and anxiety. It takes great courage for a young person to share this new discovery with their family and close friends. If a student has told you that he or she is experiencing these feelings, recognize how much they must respect and trust you to have been able to open up to you with such a private and often unaccepted part of their personhood. It took great courage and a sense of confidence in your acceptance for them to reach out to you for help.

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<sup>1</sup>Perito, John E. *Contemporary Catholic Sexuality: What is Taught and What is Practised*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

Without support, discovering a same-sex orientation can be a very difficult event in a young person's life. They are often victims of rejection and abuse. Schools are the primary setting for such hatred to be expressed. When issues of prejudice and bullying are not addressed or when little or no support is offered, schools can be a very hostile place. Without the support of family, friends, the local parish and school communities, young people can feel isolated and overcome by the challenges a same-sex orientation presents. They can feel isolated from intimate human relationships and constantly in fear of being discovered and rejected. Where these feelings are felt occasionally by all adolescents, statistics indicate that for students of same-sex orientation, these feelings are more prevalent and intense, placing them at risk. There is a deeper sense of isolation for these students because it strikes at the very core of who they are as persons. In an attempt to escape the pain of isolation, fear and anxiety, some may choose to leave their home, school and community to live in anonymity on the streets where violence, illness and exploitation are common realities. Even when they do remain at home they can experience severe depression. For these reasons, these students are at a much higher risk for suicidal thoughts and attempts.

By offering them the understanding and the acceptance they deserve and so desperately need, you can provide support and a sense of belonging as they grow to understand their human sexuality. But more importantly, you can help them to discover the beautiful gift they are to the world. Help them to discover and focus on the many gifts they have to offer – abundant kindness, their many talents, their intelligence. Our children are a precious gift from God, each one of them with a special purpose in God's plan.

For statistics on the problems associated with same-sex orientation see:

- (1) Pride and Prejudice, *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth: Fact Sheet on Risks*. Toronto Youth Services, 2002.
- (2) Pride and Prejudice, *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth: Fact Sheet on Risks*. Toronto Youth Services, 2003.

## **11. What challenges do parents face when they learn that their child's sexual orientation may be or is homosexual?**

The challenges parents face are many and varied. Parents who continue to lovingly accept and support their child may fear what their child will experience. They may fear for their child's safety and happiness. Some parents may find it difficult to accept either the child or his/her orientation. On the other hand, some parents may accept their child's sexual orientation but feel sadness, fear, confusion and even anger because of society's mistreatment of sexual minorities. Their misunderstanding about homosexuality, their own personal biases and prejudices, their denial of the issue, their sense of loss, or their discomfort in general about sexuality are some of the variables that can get in the way of their ability to offer their child the unconditional love they deserve.

Parents can be in as much need as the child of pastoral care and of a loving, supportive, faith-filled community.

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**APPENDIX**

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**THEOLOGICAL  
FOUNDATIONS**

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## UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE

### The Word of God

“The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.” This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.

“Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #85, 86)

### Interpreting Scripture

How does the Catholic community go about interpreting God’s Word in the Scriptures? How can we understand what its teaching means for us today in terms of ethics and morality? To answer these questions we need to understand two very important tools of scriptural scholarship: *exegesis* and *hermeneutics*. These complicated-sounding terms describe two activities that we all engage in regularly: analysis and interpretation. In the case of scripture study, however, they are applied with a certain academic rigour and discipline.

*Exegesis* refers to the study of scripture texts in their original context. It looks at the language, the historical context in which these texts were originally written, the religious traditions and other existing writings that influenced the authors of the texts. To understand fully what the authors intended, we need to understand something about their world, their motivations, and so on. For example, imagine that Grade 12 students one hundred years from now were to do a research paper on the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. To do so, they would have to know something about the political situation in the world as it was in 2001. They would have to know something about the different religious groups and movements. They would have to be aware of the biases of the different sources from which they were getting their information. For instance, newspapers from the United States, Israel, Canada, and Saudi Arabia would all cover the same event from very different perspectives. Students in the next century would have to distinguish these sources in order to understand the complexity of the situation. There would also be books written on the subject, documentary and news film and audio coverage, and even songs and poetry. There would be artifacts and memorials built of stone. How would each of these add to their understanding of the event? Why is it important to understand each source of information in its original context? That is the task of exegesis – analyzing the text or event in question as much as possible within its original context.

*Hermeneutics* is essentially the task of interpretation. When we interpret something, we do so with reference to something else. For example, say those same high school students in the next century were doing a research paper on the evolution of airport security procedures since the

dawn of air travel. They would completely miss the mark if they failed to recognize the importance of the September 11 terrorist attack as a key factor leading to changes in airport security. We can understand the sharp increase in security at airports early in the twenty-first century by seeing it *in light of* the terrorist attack that used passenger aircraft as weapons of terror. September 11 and the ongoing threat of terrorism becomes a hermeneutical lens through which we understand things like changes to airport security.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *In Search of the Good: A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living*, 2004, Publication Services, CCCB.

## HOMOSEXUALITY AND SCRIPTURE

### 1. Homosexuality and Scripture

The scripture passages on homosexuality found in the Jewish testaments can only be understood in light of the teachings of Jesus in the Christian Scriptures and the Creation stories of Genesis.

Jesus identified for us the two great commandments of love. It is always out of love that we interact with God and with each other; including ourselves.

The Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in their letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, interprets the related passages in the Jewish Testaments in this way:

#6. Providing a basic plan for understanding this entire discussion of homosexuality is the theology of creation we find in Genesis. God, by his infinite wisdom and love, brings into existence all of reality as a reflection of his goodness. He fashions mankind, male and female, in his own image and likeness. Human beings, therefore, are nothing less than the work of God himself; and in the complementarity of the sexes, they are called to reflect the inner unity of the Creator. They do this in a striking way in their cooperation with him in the transmission of life by a mutual donation of the self to the other.

In “Genesis” 3, we find that this truth about persons being an image of God has been obscured by original sin. There inevitably follows a loss of awareness of the covenantal character of the union these persons had with God and with each other. The human body retains its “spousal significance” but this is now clouded by sin. Thus, in “Genesis” 19:1-11, the deterioration due to sin continues in the story of the men of Sodom. There can be no doubt of the moral judgment made there against homosexual relations. In “Leviticus” 18:22 and 20:13, in the course of describing the conditions necessary for belonging to the Chosen People, the author excludes from the People of God those who behave in a homosexual fashion.

Against the background of this exposition of theocratic law, an eschatological perspective is developed by St. Paul when, in 1 “Cor.” 6:9, he proposes the same doctrine and lists those who behave in a homosexual fashion among those who shall not enter the Kingdom of God.

In “Romans” 1:18-32, still building on the moral traditions of his forebears, but in the new context of the confrontation between Christianity and the pagan society of his day, Paul uses homosexual behaviour as an example of the blindness which has overcome humankind. Instead of the original harmony between Creator and creatures, the acute distortion of idolatry has led to all kinds of moral excess. Paul is at a loss to find a clearer example of this disharmony than homosexual relations. Finally, 1 “Tim.” 1, in full continuity with the

Biblical position, singles out those who spread wrong doctrine and in v. 10 explicitly names as sinners those who engage in homosexual acts.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Marriage and Scripture

In the summer of 2003, as the Canadian bishops formulated their message *Marriage in the Present Day*, they looked to Scripture to formulate a Catholic understanding of the human person. They wrote:

The Vatican Council II in “*Dei Verbum*” 10, said: “It is clear, therefore, that in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they will contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”

In that spirit, we look to the biblical text in the creation of the world in the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis to convey fundamental truths about humanity. The Canadian Catholic Bishops (CCCB) point out that “two major points can be taken from this text which offer a profound understanding of the conjugal state. First, God gives human beings freedom, fertility, power, and the stewardship of all the earth and everything that inhabits it. Secondly, human beings are created in God’s image: ‘*God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them*’ (Genesis 1.27). This is the wellspring of the dignity, meaning and life of the human being.”

“The image of God is manifested in both a personal and a conjugal way. In Genesis 1.31, this image of God is the pinnacle of creation which leads to its fullness: ‘*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.*’ The image and likeness of God is not only in the very nature of the couple, but also in their power to give life through procreation.”<sup>2</sup>

## 3. The Sacrament Of Marriage

“In the eyes of the Catholic Church, marriage takes on a primary importance because Christ elevated it to the dignity of a sacrament. ‘*Even if the love between a man and a woman is imperfect, it is always called to manifest in a tangible way what Jesus revealed in abundance: the irrevocable love of God that is forever linked to our humanity.... Married couples take part in this mystery. They become living signs of it.*’<sup>[5]</sup> The sacrament of marriage is a sign of the union between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5.31-32). As the icon of God’s love, the sacrament of marriage is also the icon of human dignity and greatness. The key image of creation is reflected in the richness of the masculine and feminine dimensions of the heterosexual couple. The fact that human beings are created female and male, in God’s image, and that procreative power flows from their union are two fundamental aspects of marriage.”

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<sup>1</sup> Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*. 1986, Section V.B.6.

<sup>2</sup> Ref: Message of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Marriage In The Present Day*, July 2003.

“This social and conjugal unit – by its binding love, by its inherent ability to bear children, and by the ensuing responsibility of father and mother to care for their children – not only enriches society but is its very cornerstone. For Christians, marriage marks a new page in the sacred story that began at baptism. It is a new moment in salvation history when the couple, forming a community of life and love, becomes a sign of Christ’s love for his Church. The marriage bond is thus a covenant to be lived, an unconditional promise between two people that also involves the community.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ref: Message of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Marriage In The Present Day*, July 2003.

## THE NATURAL LAW

The Catholic tradition has confidence that human reason, reflecting on experience, can guide us morally. In other words, human reason and experience can tell us what promotes the flourishing of persons and what destroys them as persons. Persons have the innate capacity to reflect on their own conduct and to realize that conduct works towards human well-being or towards corruption. They realize too that conduct makes them particular kinds of persons, just or unjust, loving or hating and so on. The primary precepts of natural law (what reason realizes without effort) are based on desires that are universal – that good is to be done and evil avoided, that humans are curious intellectually, that they seek and need the company of others of their kind, that they desire to preserve their lives and to bring new generations of humans into being. These are not precepts of natural law because they are deep desires. They are so because reason reflecting on them understands them as reasonable, as furthering human good.

As we move further from these primary precepts, we become somewhat less certain of our conclusions. However, we still have the capacity to reason and to come to conclusions about what is best for us in our totality as persons. For this to happen, of course, we must strive to free ourselves from biases of all kinds, individual, cultural and social. And, in the confusion of the age, we need the help of revelation in order to know the precepts of natural law quickly, with certitude and with not a mixture of error.

Since truth is one, there can be no contradiction between what we know from human reason and experience and what we know from revelation. There can be only apparent contradictions, arising from misinterpreted experience, bad use of human reason or through misunderstanding the sources of revelation.

Some values are held by people universally. For example, human life is sacred. People can differ, though, about precepts which would protect human life. For example, many people do not acknowledge the sacred quality of certain human lives, like those of the fetus, the old person, the enemy, the stranger. It is easy enough to point to the error of acknowledging the value of some lives only. If human life is valuable, then it must be so wherever it is found. But it may be very difficult to persuade a person who holds to some kind of bias to change his or her mind. Some feminists trumpet the dignity of a woman's life, but are willing to kill other lives to achieve their ends, including the lives of early stage women. Some people hold for the sacred quality of life in the womb but forget its sacred quality in war or on the scaffold.

Still, the only possible way to start a dialogue between parties who disagree is to begin with what is held as a common value. If a religious optic is not shared, then one is left with reason and experience and the affect of a loving heart.

One last point with respect to experience. Obviously, we can base no precept on what has not been experienced by humans one way or another. However, the modern trend is embrace inductive reasoning to the exclusion of deductive reasoning. In other words, if we cannot point to visible, felt consequences of actions, the actions are not considered to be immoral. That is too restrictive a way of reasoning. Humans can be deductive too, able to foresee consequences which are as yet not experienced, which will follow from what we have already experienced.

## Natural Law Applied To Sexual Morality

The application of the natural law in the search for a moral expression of human sexuality has led to the Catholic understanding that underpins Church teaching. Through human experience, reason, the discoveries of science, and faith we are constantly growing in our understanding of what it means to be authentically human. We have come to know that persons have an innate desire for intimacy and a primary inclination for procreation. Natural law tells us then that sexual intercourse was designed by God to provide their fulfillment. In its fullest form, human sexual intercourse finds its expression when the purpose of both intimate, selfless love (unity) and the potential for human life (procreation) are respected. Therefore, only within a marriage between a woman and a man, where intimacy expresses a committed, selfless love and where the possibility of children is cherished and respected, is genital sexual activity morally acceptable.

## Natural Law And Homosexuality

This understanding of human sexuality applies to all regardless of their orientation. If sexual intercourse is therefore designed by God both as an act of lovemaking, of two-in-one-flesh union, and also as the means to procreate new life, to co-create – as a couple and with God’s grace – new members of the human species, - if these are the indelible meaning of sexual intimacy, written as it were into human nature and the nature of these intimate acts - then homosexual sex seems to be essentially deficient or incomplete.

Biologically speaking, homosexual sex acts are wholly non-procreative, since either the sperm or ovum element would be absent. While many homosexual couples embrace one another sexually and intimately as an expression of their love, it can be argued that such intimate genital embraces are fundamentally created to be heterosexual acts, reserved to those couples pledged to each other for life in the bonds of marriage.

Therefore the Church calls all homosexual persons, like their single heterosexual counterparts, to be chaste, that is sexually appropriate for their uncommitted, unmarried state in life.<sup>1</sup>

There is no question that the challenges this teaching places before those who experience a same-sex attraction is extremely difficult, often acknowledged as a life-long cross that cannot be borne alone. For homosexual persons who embrace these teachings, the hope of marriage and children with a same-sex partner can never be realized. It is for this reason that God offers to them God’s grace. In a similar manner those closest to them are called to offer their love and guidance to create for them a meaningful, hope-filled life, rich in intimate, loving relationship that fulfill their need for union with another; union not in the sense of sexual intercourse but in the sense of selfless, committed friendship that can sustain them throughout their lives.

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Sparks, c.s.p. [Catholic Update](#); *What the Church Teaches About Homosexuality*, July 1999.

## SIN

In general, contemporary society does not take the reality of sin seriously. This may be because moral norms have been weakened by society's permissive attitude to traditional standards, and by the predominant secularism that tends to ignore the role of God in our lives. For people of faith, sin is a reality which we recognize in ourselves and in our world. This recognition is based on our relationship with God, through our acknowledgment of God's goodness and our awareness of acting against that goodness.

Sin, then, is primarily a rupture of our relationship with God, when we go against what we know to be right. This is illustrated frequently in Scripture, where a cyclical pattern emerges of the people turning away from God, and being gently, and sometimes urgently, called back, to repent and begin again. In the New Testament, Jesus proclaims that he came for sinners, and his ministry was mainly involved in healing souls, that is, healing the whole person and not just the body.

We witness this in examples such as the woman caught in adultery, where Jesus simply says that if there is any one in the vengeful crowd without sin, then that person could throw the first stone. As the crowd thins, we realize, as they did, that we are all sinners, not just those who are "caught". Sin is a universal failing or lack. It is important to note that Jesus did not then say to the woman that she was simply free to go on her way. Rather, Scripture tells us that he said: "Neither do I condemn you...Go, and sin no more". In naming her conduct as sin and in telling her not to sin any more, he was calling her to repentance and conversion. He was clear that a change of heart and behaviour is necessary. At the same time, he also made it clear that, since we all have sin of some kind within us, we are in no position to judge or condemn anyone else. Most importantly, he indicated that our salvation, or our healing from sin, lies in God's unconditional willingness to forgive us when we repent and change – a gift of grace which opens immense possibilities in following the Christian path more virtuously.

Our traditional categories of sin still exist. Original sin is, broadly speaking, the human condition into which we are born, and actual sin consists of mortal and venial sins, our chosen actions or omissions which result from our wrong choices. All sin, in addition to causing a rupture in our relationship to God, always causes some, and sometimes massive, harm to the sinner and other persons.

Catholics are now also more aware of social sin, meaning the wrong practices that have been built into institutions through human failing. We are responsible for examining our conscience about our own faults and consequent harm done to our neighbour and therefore to our relationship with God, and also for critiquing the social fabric of our society, to ensure that we are not cooperating in injustice. An example of this would be knowledge that the clothes we buy might have been manufactured in a sweat shop that mistreats its workers or employs child labour. We could begin to question whether our investments are in ethically responsible companies. We might become aware of systematic discrimination against certain classes of people in organizations that we belong to or in the work force, and once we are aware we become partly responsible, as a member of such a body, to remedy injustice, since both individual and social conversions are needed in our world.

Jesus himself wrestled with Satan, underlying the concept that sin is an ever present reality for individuals and society. That is why conscience formation and the raising of our awareness about the reality of sin are so important in maintaining our relationship with God and our neighbour. Despite the power of sin, Catholics believe firmly in the saving power of the Resurrection, giving us the courage to repent and the conviction that we are truly released from our sins when we turn back to God in gratitude.

## CONSCIENCE

“...our conscience is our most secret core and our sanctuary. There we are alone with God, whose voice echoes in our hearts.” (*Gaudium et Spes* #16)

### What is Conscience?

Timothy O’Connell in *Principles for a Catholic Morality* identifies three related senses of the word ‘conscience’:

1) *Conscience as a capacity to recognize right and wrong.* Here conscience is a *capacity* of the human person. All people in all cultures have a general awareness that some things are right and others are wrong. The fact that individuals and societies may disagree about what is right only helps to show that all people have this capacity to know the good. This capacity refers to our basic orientation toward the good. Conscience as a capacity defines the essential identity of the human.

2) *Conscience as a process of moral reasoning.* It is not enough to have a conscience or ability to choose the right and avoid evil. We need to search out in each situation what is the right thing to do. To act according to our conscience, we must seek to learn the facts, to learn what moral values are, to reason correctly in moral matters. We must seek to be educated about moral issues. Conscience, in other words, must be formed and informed. This is a lifelong process of learning “correct seeing and right thinking”. It means relying on the community for instruction rather than relying solely on oneself.

3) *Conscience as a judgment.* Conscience is incomplete until we act on it. After examining all the factors, we still need to make a judgment and a decision and commitment to do what is right. This is conscience in the narrow sense of the term (particular concrete situations of daily living). This is the heart of conscience: we commit ourselves to do what we believe to be right and avoid what we believe to be wrong.<sup>1</sup>

Conscience is a profound aspect of humanity touching on the very core of who we are and in fact, “...our conscience is our most secret core and our sanctuary. There we are alone with God, whose voice echoes in our hearts”, (*Gaudium et Spes* #16). The exercise of conscience then, is where we enact and live out our relationship with God.

The perception of conscience has evolved into a lived response of being loved by God, as we come to understand who we are and who we are becoming in relationship with other people. Moral knowledge is social and conscience has a social dimension. With conscience, we can say that the judgment of conscience is always something I must do for myself, but is never something that we form by ourselves. No one ever comes to moral truth on one’s own. We must always consult established sources of wisdom and the Church teaches that there are many sources of moral wisdom to help us: Church teaching itself, scripture, our families, rules of our society and culture, general human knowledge and experience, all help us to form our conscience. By considering all of these sources of wisdom, we grow in freedom and truth of

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<sup>1</sup> *In Search of the Good: A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living*, CCCB Publication Services, 2004.

following the path which leads to wholeness and holiness. In so doing, *conscience* is seen as an activity of the whole person – a knowing of the heart as well as of the mind as perceived in all relationships. The Church presumes that we have formed our conscience by sincerely trying to discover God’s will in our own circumstances and situations. In other words, conscience is simply our best self, in union with God, affecting our life and well-being within community.

### **How do we make a moral judgment with an informed Conscience?**

In the making of a moral judgment using the traditional legal model, some of the questions tend to be: What is my obligation? What am I doing? What is the right thing to do? What values are at stake? What are my options? What consequences may follow? Keeping in mind the social dimension of conscience and the development of virtue and character, we now need to ask ourselves some new questions: Who am I? What am I becoming? What should I do because of who I am? From what inner place am I doing it? To whom or what am I committed? How will my decisions affect them? What will lead me towards full communion with God?

The good news in the renewal of Catholic moral theology proclaims the need for both sets of questions. To be complete, to become the persons God has called us to be in all of our relationships, we need to have a disposition of receptivity to all the sources of moral truth. When it comes to informing our conscience, we embrace all realities and possibilities. This disposition of receptivity will certainly impact who we are as persons and who we are becoming. This will help to develop within us a ‘moral instinct’ to move us along the right path to wholeness and holiness.

### **An Erroneous Conscience**

Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-informed conscience is upright and truthful. In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path. It can happen that moral conscience remains in ignorance and makes erroneous judgments about acts to be performed or already committed. In our human capacity to make judgments about right and wrong, in our attempt to grow in a basic orientation towards goodness, we may make a judgment conscientiously that is nonetheless wrong. It is without sin. It does not interfere in our relationship with God.

A person may have heard the church’s teaching, but be unable to allow it to convince his or her mind and heart, even when the teaching has been well presented. This can be true for young people who are bombarded daily with the counter messages of the culture. Invincible ignorance may be difficult to overcome. This does not imply, of course, that everyone has to be allowed to follow out his or her conscience when this would negatively affect the common good or the good of individuals.

But, how do we know that we have chosen wrong? It must be said that in conscience formation, two very important components need to be included – *discernment and dialogue*. Once we have reflected upon choosing the right path, this lifelong process of educating our conscience continues in prayer and dialogue. Discovering our call to respond to God’s presence in and through the multiple relations of life is the significant exercise of conscience. It is through

dialogue and prayer that we as humans ‘touch’ on the very core of who we are, and with God’s wisdom and enlightenment, we can recognize the error of our ways and pursue the proper path of truth.

### **A Broader Consideration...**

The method of moral theology has shifted from not only deducing moral judgments from rules, but to also discerning one’s call to respond to God’s presence in and through the multiple relations of life. The good news of the ongoing renewal of Catholic moral theology is that it is helping us appreciate morality as living the answer to the question: “*What should we do because of who we are?*” For Christians, our character and our choices ought to be the dynamic expressions of the experience of being loved by God. The challenge for us is to give expression to what being grateful for this love ought to look like in the everyday lives of those who live in the Spirit of God revealed in the life of Jesus.

## THE MORAL VIRTUES

Often when we are faced with making a moral decision, we are not prepared. It is for this reason that parents and teachers strive to develop in the young, habits that will provide for them a reasoned response to life's moral situations. In the Catholic tradition, we call habits that guide moral decision-making for the good, virtues. The term *virtue*, when used by Catholic moral theologians, signifies a habit developed and added to a faculty that is already a part of us, possessed by the soul. For example, the Catholic Church teaches that all persons are born with the faculty to love. Performing acts of charity develops the habit of acting out of love and therefore strengthens the tendency to respond in a loving way. In the case of moral virtues, habits, once well established, dispose a person to act with a certain readiness to do what is morally correct. These habits will either promote moral action or subvert it. St. Augustine described virtue in this way. "Virtue is a good habit consonant with our nature."

When it comes to morality there are three primary virtues: justice, which perfects the rational appetite or will; fortitude and temperance, which moderate the most basic appetites and passion; and prudence which seeks to perfect reason and will in the pursuit of truth and goodness. Moral virtues influence human appetites and the will so that both can be used to support the dignity and worth of the human being and promote life. These are the virtues that will sustain young adults as they grow in their understanding of human sexuality and as they discover who they are as sexual beings. One primary role of all those who nurture children into and through their young adult life is to offer them opportunities for community service, prayer, and celebration while encouraging them in the development of these virtues.

### Prudence

Freedom is a great human gift. It is the gift to decide for ourselves what we will make of our lives. God took a big risk when God created free creatures because we can use our freedom either to build up life or to destroy it. The virtue of prudence helps us to use our freedom wisely.

Prudence is a virtue associated with wisdom or more simply common sense. Prudence is the virtue that guides a good conscience. A person who carefully cultivates the habit of being prudent is more likely to make wise judgments and good choices. A prudent person is a good listener who is open to the ideas of others. Prudence is also closely associated with love. A prudent person tries to make decisions based on love. In doing so, he or she is more closely united with God.

We need the gift of prudence when we are faced with everyday choices as well as with important decisions. This gift helps us to see a situation clearly, to look at all the options open to us, to analyze the ramifications of each option, and then to decide. So an important part of prudence is seeking advice from people we trust. Prudence also helps us to learn from our mistakes and to correct the problems caused by wrong decisions.

## **Justice**

The virtue of justice promotes in us a constant will to live as Christian disciples, to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves. This virtue is associated with many forms of justice: distributive, legal, and social justice. In the area of human sexuality, the virtue of justice calls us to treat ourselves and others with dignity and respect, to act out of love and charity – not out of lust and prejudice.

## **Temperance**

Temperance has often been mistaken as a movement to ban the use of alcohol, or a limitation placed on eating and drinking. This is not the understanding used by the Church when it speaks of the virtue of temperance. Temperance is all about balance, about building habits of moderation that touch on the essentials of life—food, drink and sexual expression—guiding them toward their proper end. These appetites, as Aquinas called them, have been given to us to support and promote life. They are both good and necessary, but our desire for them can be very strong. Temperance helps us master these appetites in accordance with reason and keep them within the limits of what is good and right. For example, the virtue of temperance helps us to regulate our eating habits so that we eat only that which is good for us and helps to sustain our lives. It guides our choices around the use of alcohol, preventing drunkenness and the danger that can happen when we are not in full command of our faculties. Through chastity, temperance moderates our desires for sexual pleasure upholding human dignity and the right expression of love.

## **Fortitude**

Fortitude, which implies a certain moral strength and courage, is the virtue by which one handles the difficulties that arise when trying to do good. It overcomes the urge to be deterred from the pursuit of the good, in the face of emotional, social and/or physical fear and danger. At its strongest, fortitude can sustain right action even in the face of death. Without fortitude, many would find temperance a challenge. Fortitude provides us with the strength to follow our conscience at times when we would much rather turn away from what our reason tells us is good.

## **Chastity**

Chastity is the ordering of sexual desires in a virtuous manner. This is true for the married person as it is for the single person and those who have made a vow or promise of celibacy. As a sub virtue of temperance, “it seeks to be a consistent, enduring, joyful realization of ourselves as a sexual being, a sort of sexual flourishing. Hence a chaste sensuality can perceive sensual beauty, such as the beauty of the human body and enjoy it for its own sake. Chastity is not a denial of sexuality or a rejection of it as impure and sinful.”<sup>1</sup> It is a celebration of the gift of human sexuality.

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<sup>1</sup> *In Search of the Good: A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living*; CCCB Publication Services, 2004.

## THE CALL TO CHASTITY AND MARRIAGE

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, “Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of body and soul” (2332). The vocation of chastity is a common one to all people, no matter their state in life. Chastity is the holy and holistic approach to sexuality. It is a virtue, a power or strength, a fruit of spiritual effort that enhances the dignity of the human person and which we develop with the help of God’s grace. A chaste person tends towards having their sexual feelings in conformity with their moral judgment. Like all virtues, it is acquired and strengthened over time through the choices we make to be authentically loving persons. True love involves truth, tenderness, temperance and sacrifice. Chastity is that “spiritual energy capable of defending love from the perils of selfishness and aggressiveness, and able to advance it towards its full realization.”<sup>1</sup> Chastity also implies a cultural effort for there is “an interdependence between personal betterment and the improvement of society.”<sup>2</sup>

Young people seek loving relationships in which to share their deepest selves, as do people of all ages. Those young people who choose to have sex while dating often assume that sex will enhance and deepen their relationship. Instead, as sexual activity increases, friendship based on communication and the sharing of common interests and values often decreases. Without a long-term commitment, the relationship can take on a one-dimensional, sexual character and other forms of intimacy may be eclipsed in favour of sex. Emotions stirred by having sex may obscure a young person’s view of the relationship and deem it to be more healthy than it truly is. The impact wrought by a break-up can be so soul-damaging to a young person that with the addition of other stress factors, it may render them suicidal.

The church sees sexual relations as an expression of deep abiding love between a man and a woman – love so profound that the two individuals pledge themselves to mutual, life-long commitment in marriage. The sexual act that expresses love and intimacy should be the full meeting and sharing of body, mind, and heart: it is not to be taken lightly, as mere recreation or an affectionate expression between people who are not committed to each other. Henri Nouwen in his book *Intimacy* expresses eloquently the complexity of sexual relations and the ramifications for the family:

Every sexual relationship with built-in reservations, with mental restrictions or time limits...means “I want you now, but not tomorrow. I want something from you, but I don’t want *you*.” Love is limitless. Only when men and women give themselves to each other in total surrender, that, with their whole person for their whole life, can their encounter bear full fruits. When through the careful growth of their relationship men and women have come to the freedom of total disarmament, their giving also becomes forgiving, their nakedness does not evoke shame but desire to share, and their ultimate vulnerability becomes the core of their mutual strength. New life is born in the state of total vulnerability – this is the mystery of love. Power kills. Weakness creates. It creates autonomy,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Pontifical Council for the Family: The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, Guidelines for Education Within the Family*. Originally appeared in *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius), 131.

<sup>2</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 25, no. 1.

self-awareness and freedom. It creates an openness to give and receive in mutuality. And finally it creates the good ground on which new life can come to full development and maturity. This explains why the highest safeguard for the physical, mental and spiritual health of the child is not primarily the attention paid to the child but the unrestricted love of the parents for each other.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus' first miracle, performed at the wedding feast, shows us among other things that God's nature and love are revealed in relationships that are committed or covenantal. A covenant is a deeply personal, solemn promise made between persons. Especially in this era of short-term relationships, a pledge of faithful love – a covenant – requires maturity, realism, and preparation. Living out that covenant over a lifetime is possible with the immensely graced love given through the sacrament of marriage. The sacrament of marriage is more than the wedding ceremony itself; rather, the sacrament is the couple's sharing of their whole life together, with openness to life and living out of the sacrament in fidelity, in good times and in bad.

The church's belief in the permanence of marriage is based on Jesus' response to a crowd that asked him about divorce. He said that in marriage, “‘the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matt.19: 5, 6). The wonder of marriage is that the love shared between the couple shows to the world something of the love that God has for all of us. The God who is love is made visible in the love of the couple. God's abiding, eternal love for us is mirrored in the life-long commitment of marriage.

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<sup>3</sup> Nouwen, Henri. *Intimacy*, p. 32, San Francisco: Harper, reissued 1981.

## SCANDAL

How we act or do not act may encourage those who belong to the same families, institutions, and communities toward evil. Giving scandal amounts to doing wrong against our neighbours, because love for our neighbour dictates that we encourage one another to virtuous conduct, e.g. a teacher walking through the crowded hallways of a school, creates scandal when they do not speak out as they witness an act of prejudice.

A common problem is that some people appear to see scandal in anything, maliciously construing innocent actions as perverse. Jesus was a source of scandal for the Pharisees because he ate with the prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners, thus, the term *pharisaical scandal*. Nevertheless, Jesus continued his mission, challenging those who were scandalized to realize that he came to call sinners, not the righteous. Thus, for sufficient reason a Christian might rightly take some action though some members of the Church or community will be scandalized by it.

An external action or omission that gives scandal may or may not be sinful in itself. For example, Paul urged those Corinthians eating meat offered in pagan temples to refrain from doing so. Paul told them that loving concern for their neighbours prohibited them from allowing their liberty to be a stumbling block, a scandal, for those of weak conscience (1 Cor 8:9). Thus, charity might oblige a person to refrain from conduct foreseen to lead others to evil, though the conduct in question may not be wrong in itself,<sup>1</sup> e.g., a male and female university student cohabiting off campus.

Application to the question of homosexuality:

A high school which may be seen by reasonable people generally to be giving tacit consent to homosexual sexual activity would be guilty of grave scandal. However:

- 1) the non-action of a school administration in a particular case would have to be analyzed carefully. For example, if what is at stake is some form of homosexual romantic behaviour (known not so much by actions in themselves, but by context and intention), then this is much less serious than genital sexual actions.
- 2) the non-action of a school administration could be considered in certain cases as adopting a lesser of two evils approach. If it is obvious through the general teaching of the school and by an explanation in the present case that the school does not give approval to the situation under consideration, then non-action would not necessarily be tacit consent.

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<sup>1</sup> McBrien, Richard P. *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*. Harper Collins: San Francisco. 1995.



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**CATHOLIC  
CHURCH  
TEACHING: RESOURCES**

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**PASTORAL CARE OF HOMOSEXUAL PERSONS**  
**The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith**

Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church issued on October 1, 1986.

1. The issue of homosexuality and the moral evaluation of homosexual acts have increasingly become a matter of public debate, even in Catholic circles. Since this debate often advances arguments and makes assertions inconsistent with the teaching of the Catholic Church, it is quite rightly a cause for concern to all engaged in the pastoral ministry, and this Congregation has judged it to be of sufficiently grave and widespread importance to address to the Bishops of the Catholic Church this Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons.

2. Naturally, an exhaustive treatment of this complex issue cannot be attempted here, but we will focus our reflection within the distinctive context of the Catholic moral perspective. It is a perspective which finds support in the more secure findings of the natural sciences, which have their own legitimate and proper methodology and field of inquiry.

However, the Catholic moral viewpoint is founded on human reason illumined by faith and is consciously motivated by the desire to do the will of God our Father. The Church is thus in a position to learn from scientific discovery but also to transcend the horizons of science and to be confident that her more global vision does greater justice to the rich reality of the human person in his spiritual and physical dimensions, created by God and heir, by grace, to eternal life.

It is within this context, then, that it can be clearly seen that the phenomenon of homosexuality, complex as it is, and with its many consequences for society and ecclesial life, is a proper focus for the Church's pastoral care. It thus requires of her ministers attentive study, active concern and honest, theologically well-balanced counsel.

3. Explicit treatment of the problem was given in this Congregation's "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics" of December 29, 1975. That document stressed the duty of trying to understand the homosexual condition and noted that culpability for homosexual acts should only be judged with prudence. At the same time the Congregation took note of the distinction commonly drawn between the homosexual condition or tendency and individual homosexual actions. These were described as deprived of their essential and indispensable finality, as being "intrinsically disordered", and able in no case to be approved of (cf. n. 8, Para. 4).

In the discussion which followed the publication of the Declaration, however, an overly benign interpretation was given to the homosexual condition itself, some going so far as to call it neutral, or even good. Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.

Therefore special concern and pastoral attention should be directed toward those who have this condition, lest they be led to believe that the living out of this orientation in homosexual activity is a morally acceptable option. It is not.

4. An essential dimension of authentic pastoral care is the identification of causes of confusion regarding the Church's teaching. One is a new exegesis of Sacred Scripture which claims variously that Scripture has nothing to say on the subject of homosexuality, or that it somehow tacitly approves of it, or that all of its moral injunctions are so culture-bound that they are no longer applicable to contemporary life. These views are gravely erroneous and call for particular attention here.

5. It is quite true that the Biblical literature owes to the different epochs in which it was written a good deal of its varied patterns of thought and expression ("Dei Verbum" 12). The Church today addresses the Gospel to a world which differs in many ways from ancient days. But the world in which the New Testament was written was already quite diverse from the situation in which the Sacred Scriptures of the Hebrew People had been written or compiled, for example.

What should be noticed is that, in the presence of such remarkable diversity, there is nevertheless a clear consistency within the Scriptures themselves on the moral issue of homosexual behaviour. The Church's doctrine regarding this issue is thus based, not on isolated phrases for facile theological argument, but on the solid foundation of a constant Biblical testimony. The community of faith today, in unbroken continuity with the Jewish and Christian communities within which the ancient Scriptures were written, continues to be nourished by those same Scriptures and by the Spirit of Truth whose Word they are. It is likewise essential to recognize that the Scriptures are not properly understood when they are interpreted in a way which contradicts the Church's living Tradition. To be correct, the interpretation of Scripture must be in substantial accord with that Tradition.

The Vatican Council II in "Dei Verbum" 10, put it this way: "It is clear, therefore, that in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls". In that spirit we wish to outline briefly the Biblical teaching.

6. Providing a basic plan for understanding this entire discussion of homosexuality is the theology of creation we find in Genesis. God, by his infinite wisdom and love, brings into existence all of reality as a reflection of his goodness. He fashions mankind, male and female, in his own image and likeness. Human beings, therefore, are nothing less than the work of God himself; and in the complementarity of the sexes, they are called to reflect the inner unity of the Creator. They do this in a striking way in their cooperation with him in the transmission of life by a mutual donation of the self to the other.

In "Genesis" 3, we find that this truth about persons being an image of God has been obscured by original sin. There inevitably follows a loss of awareness of the covenantal character of the union these persons had with God and with each other. The human body retains its "spousal significance" but this is now clouded by sin. Thus, in "Genesis" 19:1-11, the deterioration due to sin continues in the story of the men of Sodom. There can be no doubt of the moral judgment made there against homosexual relations. In "Leviticus" 18:22 and 20:13, in the course of

describing the conditions necessary for belonging to the Chosen People, the author excludes from the People of God those who behave in a homosexual fashion.

Against the background of this exposition of theocratic law, an eschatological perspective is developed by St. Paul when, in 1 “Cor.” 6: 9, he proposes the same doctrine and lists those who behave in a homosexual fashion among those who shall not enter the Kingdom of God. In “Romans” 1:18-32, still building on the moral traditions of his forebears, but in the new context of the confrontation between Christianity and the pagan society of his day, Paul uses homosexual behaviour as an example of the blindness which has overcome humankind. Instead of the original harmony between Creator and creatures, the acute distortion of idolatry has led to all kinds of moral excess. Paul is at a loss to find a clearer example of this disharmony than homosexual relations. Finally, 1 “Tim.” 1, in full continuity with the Biblical position, singles out those who spread wrong doctrine and in v. 10 explicitly names as sinners those who engage in homosexual acts.

7. The Church, obedient to the Lord who founded her and gave to her the sacramental life, celebrates the divine plan of the loving and life-giving union of men and women in the sacrament of marriage. It is only in the marital relationship that the use of the sexual faculty can be morally good. A person engaging in homosexual behaviour therefore acts immorally.

To choose someone of the same sex for one’s sexual activity is to annul the rich symbolism and meaning, not to mention the goals, of the Creator’s sexual design. Homosexual activity is not a complementary union, able to transmit life; and so it thwarts the call to a life of that form of self-giving which the Gospel says is the essence of Christian living. This does not mean that homosexual persons are not often generous and giving of themselves; but when they engage in homosexual activity they confirm within themselves a disordered sexual inclination which is essentially self-indulgent.

As in every moral disorder, homosexual activity prevents one’s own fulfilment and happiness by acting contrary to the creative wisdom of God. The Church, in rejecting erroneous opinions regarding homosexuality, does not limit but rather defends personal freedom and dignity realistically and authentically understood.

8. Thus, the Church’s teaching today is in organic continuity with the Scriptural perspective and with her own constant Tradition. Though today’s world is in many ways quite new, the Christian community senses the profound and lasting bonds which join us to those generations who have gone before us, “marked with the sign of faith”.

Nevertheless, increasing numbers of people today, even within the Church, are bringing enormous pressure to bear on the Church to accept the homosexual condition as though it were not disordered and to condone homosexual activity. Those within the Church who argue in this fashion often have close ties with those with similar views outside it. These latter groups are guided by a vision opposed to the truth about the human person, which is fully disclosed in the mystery of Christ. They reflect, even if not entirely consciously, a materialistic ideology which denies the transcendent nature of the human person as well as the supernatural vocation of every individual.

The Church's ministers must ensure that homosexual persons in their care will not be misled by this point of view, so profoundly opposed to the teaching of the Church. But the risk is great and there are many who seek to create confusion regarding the Church's position, and then to use that confusion to their own advantage.

9. The movement within the Church, which takes the form of pressure groups of various names and sizes, attempts to give the impression that it represents all homosexual persons who are Catholics. As a matter of fact, its membership is by and large restricted to those who either ignore the teaching of the Church or seek somehow to undermine it. It brings together under the aegis of Catholicism homosexual persons who have no intention of abandoning their homosexual behaviour. One tactic used is to protest that any and all criticism of or reservations about homosexual people, their activity and lifestyle, are simply diverse forms of unjust discrimination. There is an effort in some countries to manipulate the Church by gaining the often well-intentioned support of her pastors with a view to changing civil-statutes and laws. This is done in order to conform to these pressure groups' concept that homosexuality is at least a completely harmless, if not an entirely good, thing. Even when the practice of homosexuality may seriously threaten the lives and well-being of a large number of people, its advocates remain undeterred and refuse to consider the magnitude of the risks involved.

The Church can never be so callous. It is true that her clear position cannot be revised by pressure from civil legislation or the trend of the moment. But she is really concerned about the many who are not represented by the pro-homosexual movement and about those who may have been tempted to believe its deceitful propaganda. She is also aware that the view that homosexual activity is equivalent to, or as acceptable as, the sexual expression of conjugal love has a direct impact on society's understanding of the nature and rights of the family and puts them in jeopardy.

10. It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs. It reveals a kind of disregard for others which endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law.

But the proper reaction to crimes committed against homosexual persons should not be to claim that the homosexual condition is not disordered. When such a claim is made and when homosexual activity is consequently condoned, or when civil legislation is introduced to protect behaviour to which no one has any conceivable right, neither the Church nor society at large should be surprised when other distorted notions and practices gain ground, and irrational and violent reactions increase.

11. It has been argued that the homosexual orientation in certain cases is not the result of deliberate choice; and so the homosexual person would then have no choice but to behave in a homosexual fashion. Lacking freedom, such a person, even if engaged in homosexual activity, would not be culpable.

Here, the Church's wise moral tradition is necessary since it warns against generalizations in judging individual cases. In fact, circumstances may exist, or may have existed in the past, which would reduce or remove the culpability of the individual in a given instance; or other circumstances may increase it. What is at all costs to be avoided is the unfounded and demeaning assumption that the sexual behaviour of homosexual persons is always and totally compulsive and therefore inculpable. What is essential is that the fundamental liberty which characterizes the human person and gives him his dignity be recognized as belonging to the homosexual person as well. As in every conversion from evil, the abandonment of homosexual activity will require a profound collaboration of the individual with God's liberating grace.

12. What, then, are homosexual persons to do who seek to follow the Lord? Fundamentally, they are called to enact the will of God in their life by joining whatever sufferings and difficulties they experience in virtue of their condition to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross. That Cross, for the believer, is a fruitful sacrifice since from that death come life and redemption. While any call to carry the cross or to understand a Christian's suffering in this way will predictably be met with bitter ridicule by some, it should be remembered that this is the way to eternal life for "all" who follow Christ.

It is, in effect, none other than the teaching of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians when he says that the Spirit produces in the lives of the faithful "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control" (5:22) and further (v. 24), "You cannot belong to Christ unless you crucify all self-indulgent passions and desires".

It is easily misunderstood, however, if it is merely seen as a pointless effort at self-denial. The Cross is a denial of self, but in service to the will of God himself who makes life come from death and empowers those who trust in him to practise virtue in place of vice.

To celebrate the Paschal Mystery, it is necessary to let that Mystery become imprinted in the fabric of daily life. To refuse to sacrifice one's own will in obedience to the will of the Lord is effectively to prevent salvation. Just as the Cross was central to the expression of God's redemptive love for us in Jesus, so the conformity of the self-denial of homosexual men and women with the sacrifice of the Lord will constitute for them a source of self-giving which will save them from a way of life which constantly threatens to destroy them.

Christians who are homosexual are called, as all of us are, to a chaste life. As they dedicate their lives to understanding the nature of God's personal call to them, they will be able to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance more faithfully and receive the Lord's grace so freely offered there in order to convert their lives more fully to his Way.

13. We recognize, of course, that in great measure the clear and successful communication of the Church's teaching to all the faithful, and to society at large, depends on the correct instruction and fidelity of her pastoral ministers. The Bishops have the particularly grave responsibility to see to it that their assistants in the ministry, above all the priests, are rightly informed and personally disposed to bring the teaching of the Church in its integrity to everyone.

The characteristic concern and good will exhibited by many clergy and religious in their pastoral care for homosexual persons is admirable, and, we hope, will not diminish. Such devoted ministers should have the confidence that they are faithfully following the will of the Lord by encouraging the homosexual person to lead a chaste life and by affirming that person's God-given dignity and worth.

14. With this in mind, this Congregation wishes to ask the Bishops to be especially cautious of any programmes which may seek to pressure the Church to change her teaching, even while claiming not to do so. A careful examination of their public statements and the activities they promote reveals a studied ambiguity by which they attempt to mislead the pastors and the faithful. For example, they may present the teaching of the Magisterium, but only as if it were an optional source for the formation of one's conscience. Its specific authority is not recognized. Some of these groups will use the word "Catholic" to describe either the organization or its intended members, yet they do not defend and promote the teaching of the Magisterium; indeed, they even openly attack it. While their members may claim a desire to conform their lives to the teaching of Jesus, in fact they abandon the teaching of his Church. This contradictory action should not have the support of the Bishops in any way.

15. We encourage the Bishops, then, to provide pastoral care in full accord with the teaching of the Church for homosexual persons of their dioceses. No authentic pastoral programme will include organizations in which homosexual persons associate with each other without clearly stating that homosexual activity is immoral. A truly pastoral approach will appreciate the need for homosexual persons to avoid the near occasions of sin.

We would heartily encourage programmes where these dangers are avoided. But we wish to make it clear that departure from the Church's teaching, or silence about it, in an effort to provide pastoral care is neither caring nor pastoral. Only what is true can ultimately be pastoral. The neglect of the Church's position prevents homosexual men and women from receiving the care they need and deserve.

An authentic pastoral programme will assist homosexual persons at all levels of the spiritual life: through the sacraments, and in particular through the frequent and sincere use of the sacrament of Reconciliation, through prayer, witness, counsel and individual care. In such a way, the entire Christian community can come to recognize its own call to assist its brothers and sisters, without deluding them or isolating them.

16. From this multi-faceted approach there are numerous advantages to be gained, not the least of which is the realization that a homosexual person, as every human being, deeply needs to be nourished at many different levels simultaneously.

The human person, made in the image and likeness of God, can hardly be adequately described by a reductionist reference to his or her sexual orientation. Every one living on the face of the earth has personal problems and difficulties, but challenges to growth, strengths, talents and gifts as well. Today, the Church provides a badly needed context for the care of the human person when she refuses to consider the person as a "heterosexual" or a "homosexual" and insists that

every person has a fundamental identity: the creature of God, and by grace, his child and heir to eternal life.

17. In bringing this entire matter to the Bishops' attention, this Congregation wishes to support their efforts to assure that the teaching of the Lord and his Church on this important question be communicated fully to all the faithful.

In light of the points made above, they should decide for their own dioceses the extent to which an intervention on their part is indicated. In addition, should they consider it helpful, further coordinated action at the level of their National Bishops' Conference may be envisioned.

In a particular way, we would ask the Bishops to support, with the means at their disposal, the development of appropriate forms of pastoral care for homosexual persons. These would include the assistance of the psychological, sociological and medical sciences, in full accord with the teaching of the Church.

They are encouraged to call on the assistance of all Catholic theologians who, by teaching what the Church teaches, and by deepening their reflections on the true meaning of human sexuality and Christian marriage with the virtues it engenders, will make an important contribution in this particular area of pastoral care.

The Bishops are asked to exercise special care in the selection of pastoral ministers so that by their own high degree of spiritual and personal maturity and by their fidelity to the Magisterium, they may be of real service to homosexual persons, promoting their health and well-being in the fullest sense. Such ministers will reject theological opinions which dissent from the teaching of the Church and which, therefore, cannot be used as guidelines for pastoral care.

We encourage the Bishops to promote appropriate catechetical programmes based on the truth about human sexuality in its relationship to the family as taught by the Church. Such programmes should provide a good context within which to deal with the question of homosexuality.

This catechesis would also assist those families of homosexual persons to deal with this problem which affects them so deeply.

All support should be withdrawn from any organizations which seek to undermine the teaching of the Church, which are ambiguous about it, or which neglect it entirely. Such support, or even the semblance of such support, can be gravely misinterpreted. Special attention should be given to the practice of scheduling religious services and to the use of Church buildings by these groups, including the facilities of Catholic schools and colleges. To some, such permission to use Church property may seem only just and charitable; but in reality it is contradictory to the purpose for which these institutions were founded, it is misleading and often scandalous.

In assessing proposed legislation, the Bishops should keep as their uppermost concern the responsibility to defend and promote family life.

18. The Lord Jesus promised, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free” (Jn 8:32). Scripture bids us speak the truth in love (cf. Eph 4:15). The God who is at once truth and love calls the Church to minister to every man, woman and child with the pastoral solicitude of our compassionate Lord. It is in this spirit that we have addressed this Letter to the Bishops of the Church, with the hope that it will be of some help as they care for those whose suffering can only be intensified by error and lightened by truth.

During an audience granted to the undersigned Prefect, His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, approved this Letter, adopted in an ordinary session of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and ordered it to be published.

Given at Rome, 1 October 1986.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect

Alberto Bovone  
Titular Archbishop of Caesarea in Numidia  
Secretary

## CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH EXCERPT

(September 1997 Revision)

### *Chastity and Homosexuality*

**2357** Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity,<sup>1</sup> tradition has always declared that “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.”<sup>2</sup> They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.

**2358** The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God’s will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord’s Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

**2359** Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.

### “In Brief” (Summary Section Excerpts)

**2393** By creating the human being man and woman, God gives personal dignity equally to the one and the other. Each of them, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity.

**2394** Christ is the model of chastity. Every baptized person is called to lead a chaste life, each according to his particular state of life.

**2395** Chastity means the integration of sexuality within the person. It includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery.

**2396** Among the sins gravely contrary to chastity are masturbation, fornication, pornography, and homosexual practices.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Gen* 19:1-29; *Rom* 1:24-27; *1 Cor* 6:10; *1 Tim* 1:10.

<sup>2</sup> CDF, *Persona humana* 8.

November 21, 1997

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## **THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S TEACHING ON HOMOSEXUALITY**

The Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality is often widely misunderstood by the general public, even though it has been clearly explained in the Pastoral Letter to Homosexuals, published in 1986 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, and in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, in paragraphs 2357 to 2359. This is due, it seems, to the interpretation given to the Church's statement that homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered."

One must note that the Church's concern rests on freely consensual acts and not on a tendency or inclination. To have a tendency or inclination does not involve the moral order. It is neither morally good nor morally wrong.

As for the word disordered, which is borrowed from classical morality, it is used to describe a general behaviour held to be deviant in relation to the moral norm. The norm considered here is that sexual relations are carried out by two people of opposite sex. Therefore when the Church speaks about homosexuality as an "objective disorder", it is speaking not of the tendency but of genital acts between people of the same sex.

The church recognizes the dignity of all persons and neither defines nor catalogues them according to their sexual orientation. As the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith mentions, "every person has a fundamental identity: the creature of God, and by grace his child and heir to eternal life." All human beings are precious in God's eyes. The love that one person has for another is a gift from God and implies observance of his law by all people regardless of their sexual orientation. Everyone must move towards an ideal, even if it is only gradually attained. (Cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 34).

The Church is consistent with its doctrine in affirming the dignity of homosexuals. The Church has always taught that the sexual (genital) expression of love is found, according to God's plan of creation, uniquely in marriage, that is, in the permanent union between a man and a woman. Consequently, the Church can in no way put a homosexual partnership on the same footing as a heterosexual marriage. Finally, the sexual (genital) expression of love must allow for the eventual creation of new life. For these reasons, the Church does not approve of homosexual genital acts.

By its mission, the Catholic Church is called to present in every age a demanding vision and ethic of marriage and sexuality. The Church is however conscious that its teaching can sometimes be difficult to put into practise. Also, when faced with failures, the Church must exercise its pastoral sense: it cannot reject those who are confronted with failures, but should help bring them to a better understanding and acceptance of the doctrine given to it by God.

The church recognizes and defends the human rights of each person. However, it cannot recognize as part of these rights the fulfilment of acts that are morally wrong. All persons have the basic human right to be treated by individuals and society with dignity, respect and justice regardless of their behaviour. For sure, the homosexual community is not an exception to this; it has a particular right to pastoral care from the Church.

**Always Our Children:  
A Pastoral Message to Parents  
of Homosexual Children  
and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers**

*A Statement of the Bishops' Committee on Marriage and Family*

**Preface**

The purpose of this pastoral message is to reach out to parents trying to cope with the discovery of homosexuality in their adolescent or adult child. It urges families to draw upon the reservoirs of faith, hope, and love as they face uncharted futures. It asks them to recognize that the Church offers enormous spiritual resources to strengthen and support them at this moment in their family's life and in the days to come.

This message draws upon the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the teachings of Pope John Paul II, and statements of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and of our own conference. This message is not a treatise on homosexuality. It is not a systematic presentation of the Church's moral teaching. It does not break any new ground theologically. Rather, relying on the Church's teaching, as well as our own pastoral experience, we intend to speak words of faith, hope, and love to parents who need the Church's loving presence at a time that may be one of the most challenging in their lives. We also hope this message will be helpful to priests and pastoral ministers who often are the first ones parents or their children approach with their struggles and anxieties.

In recent years we have tried to reach out to families in difficult circumstances. Our initiatives took the form of short statements, like this one, addressed to people who thought they were beyond the Church's circle of care. *Always Our Children* follows in the same tradition.

This message is not intended for advocacy purposes or to serve a particular agenda. It is not to be understood as an endorsement of what some call a "homosexual lifestyle." *Always Our Children* is an outstretched hand of the bishops' Committee on Marriage and Family to parents and other family members, offering them a fresh look at the grace present in family life and the unfailing mercy of Christ our Lord.

**An even more generous, intelligent and prudent pastoral commitment, modeled on the Good Shepherd, is called for in cases of families which, often independently of their own wishes and through pressures of various other kinds, find themselves faced by situations which are objectively difficult.**

**- John Paul II, On the Family, 1981, no. 77**

## A Critical Moment, A Time of Grace

As you begin to read this message you may feel that your life is in turmoil. You and your family might be faced with one of the difficult situations of which our Holy Father speaks:

- You think your adolescent child is experiencing a same-sex attraction and/or you observe attitudes and behaviors that you find confusing or upsetting or with which you disagree.
- Your son or daughter has made it known that he or she has a homosexual orientation.
- You experience a tension between loving your child as God's precious creation and not wanting to endorse any behavior you know the Church teaches is wrong.

You need not face this painful time alone, without human assistance or God's grace. The Church can be an instrument of both help and healing. This is why we bishops, as pastors and teachers, write to you.

In this pastoral message, we draw upon the gift of faith as well as the sound teaching and pastoral practice of the Church to offer loving support, reliable guidance, and recommendations for ministries suited to your needs and to those of your child. Our message speaks of accepting yourself, your beliefs and values, your questions, and all you may be struggling with at this moment; accepting and loving your child as a gift of God; and accepting the full truth of God's revelation about the dignity of the human person and the meaning of human sexuality. Within the Catholic moral vision there is no contradiction among these levels of acceptance, for truth and love are not opposed. They are inseparably joined and rooted in one person, Jesus Christ, who reveals God to be ultimate truth and saving love.

We address our message also to the wider church community, and especially to priests and other pastoral ministers, asking that our words be translated into attitudes and actions that follow the way of love, as Christ has taught. It is through the community of his faithful that Jesus offers you hope, help, and healing, so your whole family might continue to grow into the intimate community of life and love that God intends.

### Accepting Yourself

Because some of you might be swept up in a tide of emotions, we focus first on feelings. Although the gift of human sexuality can be a great mystery at times, the Church's teaching on homosexuality is clear. However, because the terms of that teaching have now become very personal in regard to your son or daughter, you may feel confused and conflicted.

You could be experiencing many different emotions, all in varying degrees, such as the following:

**Relief.** Perhaps you had sensed for some time that your son or daughter was different in some way. Now he or she has come to you and entrusted something very significant. It may be that other siblings learned of this before you and were reluctant to tell you. Regardless, though, a burden has been lifted. Acknowledge the possibility that your child has told you this not to hurt

you or create distance, but out of love and trust and with a desire for honesty, intimacy, and closer communication.

**Anger.** You may be feeling deceived or manipulated by your son or daughter. You could be angry with your spouse, blaming him or her for “making the child this way”—especially if there has been a difficult parent-child relationship. You might be angry with yourself for not recognizing indications of homosexuality. You could be feeling disappointment, along with anger, if family members, and sometimes even siblings, are rejecting their homosexual brother or sister. It is just as possible to feel anger if family members or friends seem overly accepting and encouraging of homosexuality. Also—and not to be discounted—is a possible anger with God that all this is happening.

**Mourning.** You may now feel that your child is not exactly the same individual you once thought you knew. You envision that your son or daughter may never give you grandchildren. These lost expectations as well as the fact that homosexual persons often encounter discrimination and open hostility can cause you great sadness.

**Fear.** You may fear for your child’s physical safety and general welfare in the face of prejudice against homosexual people. In particular, you may be afraid that others in your community might exclude or treat your child or your family with contempt. The fear of your child contracting HIV/AIDS or another sexually transmitted disease is serious and ever-present. If your child is distraught, you may be concerned about attempted suicide.

**Guilt, Shame, and Loneliness.** “If only we had . . . or had not . . .” are words with which parents can torture themselves at this stage. Regrets and disappointments rise up like ghosts from the past. A sense of failure can lead you into a valley of shame which, in turn, can isolate you from your children, your family, and other communities of support.

**Parental Protectiveness and Pride.** Homosexual persons often experience discrimination and acts of violence in our society. As a parent, you naturally want to shield your children from harm, regardless of their age. You may still insist: “You are always my child; nothing can ever change that. You are also a child of God, gifted and called for a purpose in God’s design.”

There are two important things to keep in mind as you try to sort out your feelings. First, listen to them. They can contain clues that lead to a fuller discovery of God’s will for you. Second, because some feelings can be confusing or conflicting, it is not necessary to act upon all of them. Acknowledging them may be sufficient, but it may also be necessary to talk about your feelings. Do not expect that all tensions can or will be resolved. The Christian life is a journey marked by perseverance and prayer. It is a path leading from where we are to where we know God is calling us.

## Accepting Your Child

How can you best express your love—itself a reflection of God’s unconditional love—for your child? At least two things are necessary.

First, don’t break off contact; don’t reject your child. A shocking number of homosexual youth

end up on the streets because of rejection by their families. This, and other external pressures, can place young people at a greater risk for self-destructive behaviors like substance abuse and suicide.

Your child may need you and the family now more than ever. He or she is still the same person. This child, who has always been God's gift to you, may now be the cause of another gift: your family becoming more honest, respectful, and supportive. Yes, your love can be tested by this reality, but it can also grow stronger through your struggle to respond lovingly.

The second way to communicate love is to seek appropriate help for your child and for yourself. If your son or daughter is an adolescent, it is possible that he or she may be displaying traits which cause you anxiety such as what the child is choosing to read or view in the media, intense friendships, and other such observable characteristics and tendencies. What is called for on the part of parents is an approach which does not presume that your child has developed a homosexual orientation, and which will help you maintain a loving relationship while you provide support, information, encouragement, and moral guidance. Parents must always be vigilant about their children's behavior and exercise responsible interventions when necessary.

In many cases, it may be appropriate and necessary that your child receive professional help, including counseling and spiritual direction. It is important, of course, that he or she receive such guidance willingly. Look for a therapist who has an appreciation of religious values and who understands the complex nature of sexuality. Such a person should be experienced at helping people discern the meaning of early sexual behaviors, sexual attractions, and sexual fantasies in ways that lead to more clarity and self-identity. In the course of this, however, it is essential for you to remain open to the possibility that your son or daughter is struggling to understand and accept a basic homosexual orientation.

The meaning and implications of the term homosexual orientation are not universally agreed upon. Church teaching acknowledges a distinction between a homosexual "tendency," which proves to be "transitory," and "homosexuals who are definitively such because of some kind of innate instinct" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*, 1975, no. 8).

In light of this possibility, therefore, it seems appropriate to understand sexual orientation (heterosexual or homosexual) as a deep-seated dimension of one's personality and to recognize its relative stability in a person. A homosexual orientation produces a stronger emotional and sexual attraction toward individuals of the same sex, rather than toward those of the opposite sex. It does not totally rule out interest in, care for, and attraction toward members of the opposite sex. Having a homosexual orientation does not necessarily mean a person will engage in homosexual activity.

There seems to be no single cause of a homosexual orientation. A common opinion of experts is that there are multiple factors—genetic, hormonal, psychological—that may give rise to it. Generally, homosexual orientation is experienced as a given, not as something freely chosen. By itself, therefore, a homosexual orientation cannot be considered sinful, for morality presumes the freedom to choose.<sup>1</sup>

Some homosexual persons want to be known publicly as gay or lesbian. These terms often

express a person's level of self-awareness and self-acceptance within society. Though you might find the terms offensive because of political or social connotations, it is necessary to be sensitive to how your son or daughter is using them. Language should not be a barrier to building trust and honest communication.

You can help a homosexual person in two general ways. First, encourage him or her to cooperate with God's grace to live a chaste life. Second, concentrate on the person, not on the homosexual orientation itself. This implies respecting a person's freedom to choose or refuse therapy directed toward changing a homosexual orientation. Given the present state of medical and psychological knowledge, there is no guarantee that such therapy will succeed. Thus, there may be no obligation to undertake it, though some may find it helpful.

All in all, it is essential to recall one basic truth. God loves every person as a unique individual. Sexual identity helps to define the unique persons we are, and one component of our sexual identity is sexual orientation. Thus, our total personhood is more encompassing than sexual orientation. Human beings see the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart (cf. 1 Sm 16:7).

God does not love someone any less simply because he or she is homosexual. God's love is always and everywhere offered to those who are open to receiving it. St. Paul's words offer great hope:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39)

## **Accepting God's Plan and the Church's Ministry**

For the Christian believer, an acceptance of self and of one's homosexual child must take place within the larger context of accepting divinely revealed truth about the dignity and destiny of human persons. It is the Church's responsibility to believe and teach this truth, presenting it as a comprehensive moral vision and applying this vision in particular situations through its pastoral ministries. We present the main points of that moral teaching here.

**Every person has an inherent dignity because he or she is created in God's image.** A deep respect for the total person leads the Church to hold and teach that sexuality is a gift from God. Being created a male or female person is an essential part of the divine plan, for it is their sexuality—a mysterious blend of spirit and body—that allows human beings to share in God's own creative love and life.

**Like all gifts from God, the power and freedom of sexuality can be channeled toward good or evil.** Everyone—the homosexual and the heterosexual person—is called to personal maturity and responsibility. With the help of God's grace, everyone is called to practice the virtue of chastity in relationships. Chastity means integrating one's thoughts, feelings, and actions, in the area of human sexuality, in a way that values and respects one's own dignity and that of others. It is "the spiritual power which frees love from selfishness and aggression" (Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, 1996, no. 16).

**Christ summons all his followers—whether they are married or living a single celibate life—to a higher standard of loving.** This includes not only fidelity, forgiveness, hope, perseverance, and sacrifice, but also chastity, which is expressed in modesty and self-control. The chaste life is possible, though not always easy, for it involves a continual effort to turn toward God and away from sin, especially with the strength of the sacraments of penance and eucharist. Indeed God expects everyone to strive for the perfection of love, but to achieve it gradually through stages of moral growth (cf. John Paul II, *On the Family*, 1981, no. 34). To keep our feet on the path of conversion, God’s grace is available to and sufficient for everyone open to receiving it.

Furthermore, as homosexual persons “dedicate their lives to understanding the nature of God’s personal call to them, they will be able to celebrate the sacrament of penance more faithfully and receive the Lord’s grace so freely offered there in order to convert their lives more fully to his way” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 1986, no. 12).

To live and love chastely is to understand that “only within marriage does sexual intercourse fully symbolize the Creator’s dual design, as an act of covenant love, with the potential of co-creating new human life” (United States Catholic Conference, *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*, 1991, p. 55). This is a fundamental teaching of our Church about sexuality, rooted in the biblical account of man and woman created in the image of God and made for union with one another (Gn 2–3).

Two conclusions follow. First, it is God’s plan that sexual intercourse occur only within marriage between a man and a woman. Second, every act of intercourse must be open to the possible creation of human life. Homosexual intercourse cannot fulfill these two conditions. Therefore, the Church teaches that homogenital behavior is objectively immoral, while making the important distinction between this behavior and a homosexual orientation, which is not immoral in itself. It is also important to recognize that neither a homosexual orientation, nor a heterosexual one, leads inevitably to sexual activity. One’s total personhood is not reducible to sexual orientation or behavior.

**Respect for the God-given dignity of all persons means the recognition of human rights and responsibilities.** The teachings of the Church make it clear that the fundamental human rights of homosexual persons must be defended and that all of us must strive to eliminate any forms of injustice, oppression, or violence against them (cf. *The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 1986, no. 10).

It is not sufficient only to avoid unjust discrimination. Homosexual persons “must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2358). They, as is true of every human being, need to be nourished at many different levels simultaneously. This includes friendship, which is a way of loving and is essential to healthy human development. It is one of the richest possible human experiences. Friendship can and does thrive outside of genital sexual involvement.

**The Christian community should offer its homosexual sisters and brothers understanding and pastoral care.** More than twenty years ago we bishops stated that “Homosexuals . . . should have an active role in the Christian community” (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *To*

*Live in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Reflection on the Moral Life*, 1976, p. 19). What does this mean in practice? It means that all homosexual persons have a right to be welcomed into the community, to hear the word of God, and to receive pastoral care. Homosexual persons living chaste lives should have opportunities to lead and serve the community. However, the Church has the right to deny public roles of service and leadership to persons, whether homosexual or heterosexual, whose public behavior openly violates its teachings.

The Church also recognizes the importance and urgency of ministering to persons with HIV/AIDS. Though HIV/AIDS is an epidemic affecting the whole human race, not just homosexual persons, it has had a devastating effect upon them and has brought great sorrow to many parents, families, and friends.

Without condoning self-destructive behavior or denying personal responsibility, we reject the idea that HIV/AIDS is a direct punishment from God. Furthermore

Persons with AIDS are not distant, unfamiliar people, the objects of our mingled pity and aversion. We must keep them present to our consciousness as individuals and a community, and embrace them with unconditional love. . . . Compassion—love—toward persons infected with HIV is the only authentic Gospel response. (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Called to Compassion and Responsibility: A Response to the HIV/AIDS Crisis*, 1989)

Nothing in the Bible or in Catholic teaching can be used to justify prejudicial or discriminatory attitudes and behaviors. We reiterate here what we said in an earlier statement:

We call on all Christians and citizens of good will to confront their own fears about homosexuality and to curb the humor and discrimination that offend homosexual persons. We understand that having a homosexual orientation brings with it enough anxiety, pain and issues related to self-acceptance without society bringing additional prejudicial treatment. (*Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*, 1991, p. 55)

## **Pastoral Recommendations**

With a view toward overcoming the isolation that you or your son or daughter may be experiencing, we offer these recommendations to you as well as to priests and pastoral ministers.

### **To Parents:**

1. Accept and love yourselves as parents in order to accept and love your son or daughter. Do not blame yourselves for a homosexual orientation in your child.
2. Do everything possible to continue demonstrating love for your child. However, accepting his or her homosexual orientation does not have to include approving of all related attitudes and behavioral choices. In fact, you may need to challenge certain aspects of a lifestyle that you find objectionable.

3. Urge your son or daughter to stay joined to the Catholic faith community. If they have left the Church, urge them to return and be reconciled to the community, especially through the sacrament of penance.
4. Recommend that your son or daughter find a spiritual director/mentor to offer guidance in prayer and in leading a chaste and virtuous life.
5. Seek help for yourself, perhaps in the form of counseling or spiritual direction, as you strive for understanding, acceptance, and inner peace. Also, consider joining a parents' support group or participating in a retreat designed for Catholic parents of homosexual children. Other people have traveled the same road as you but may have journeyed even further. They can share effective ways of handling delicate family situations such as how to tell family members and friends about your child, how to explain homosexuality to younger children, and how to relate to your son or daughter's friends in a Christian way.
6. Reach out in love and service to other parents struggling with a son or daughter's homosexuality. Contact your parish about organizing a parents' support group. Your diocesan family ministry office, Catholic Charities, or a special diocesan ministry to gay and lesbian persons may be able to offer assistance.
7. As you take advantage of opportunities for education and support, remember that you can only change yourself; you can only be responsible for your own beliefs and actions, not those of your adult children.
8. Put your faith completely in God, who is more powerful, more compassionate, and more forgiving than we are or ever could be.

#### **To Church Ministers:**

1. Be available to parents and families who ask for your pastoral help, spiritual guidance, and prayer.
2. Welcome homosexual persons into the faith community, and seek out those on the margins. Avoid stereotyping and condemning. Strive first to listen. Do not presume that all homosexual persons are sexually active.
3. Learn more about homosexuality and church teaching so your preaching, teaching, and counseling will be informed and effective.
4. When speaking publicly, use the words "homosexual," "gay," and "lesbian" in honest and accurate ways.
5. Maintain a list of agencies, community groups, and counselors or other experts to whom you can refer homosexual persons or their parents and family members when they ask you for specialized assistance. Recommend agencies that operate in a manner consistent with Catholic teaching.
6. Help to establish or promote support groups for parents and family members.

7. Learn about HIV/AIDS so you will be more informed and compassionate in your ministry. Include prayers in the liturgy for those living with HIV/AIDS, their caregivers, those who have died, and their families, companions, and friends. A special Mass for healing and anointing of the sick might be connected with World AIDS Awareness Day (December 1) or with a local AIDS awareness program.

## Conclusion

For St. Paul love is the greatest of spiritual gifts. St. John considers love to be the most certain sign of God's presence. Jesus proposes it as the basis of his two great commandments, which fulfill all the law and the prophets.

Love, too, is the continuing story of every family's life. Love can be shared, nurtured, rejected, and sometimes lost. To follow Christ's way of love is the challenge before every family today. Your family now has an added opportunity to share love and to accept love. Our church communities are likewise called to an exemplary standard of love and justice. Our homosexual sisters and brothers—indeed, all people—are summoned into responsible ways of loving.

To our homosexual brothers and sisters we offer a concluding word. This message has been an outstretched hand to your parents and families inviting them to accept God's grace present in their lives now and to trust in the unfailing mercy of Jesus our Lord. Now we stretch out our hands and invite you to do the same. We are called to become one body, one spirit in Christ. We need one another if we are to “. . . grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love” (Eph 4:15-16).

Though at times you may feel discouraged, hurt, or angry, do not walk away from your families, from the Christian community, from all those who love you. In you God's love is revealed. You are always our children.

**There is no fear in love . . . perfect love drives out fear.  
(1 Jn 4:18)**

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## Notes

1. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states also: “This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most [persons with the homosexual inclination] a trial” (no. 2358).
2. In matters where sexual orientation has a clear relevance, the common good does justify its being taken into account, as noted by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in *Some Considerations Concerning the Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons*, 1992, no. 11.

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Monsignor Dennis M. Schnurr, General Secretary, NCCB/USCC

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**REACHING OUT**  
**Readings in Family Life Education**  
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In the article below, Jim Auer explores issues related to homosexuality. The reasons why some people are sexually attracted to their own sex are not well understood, although it is likely that both genetic inheritance and social environment are involved. But it is clear that sexual orientation is a complex issue with personal, social, and moral implications. It is the responsibility of Christians, as Auer points out, to use the light of God's word to reflect on the meaning of sexuality and on their attitudes toward those who are homosexual.

Not long ago, a likeable, talented high school senior was tackled in a varsity football game, hit the ground awkwardly, and never got up under his own power. Paralyzed from the neck down, he can't do anything physical by himself but breathe, talk and blink his eyelids.

Consider that situation for a moment: Something he didn't choose has made him very different from most people in some ways. He's not different in every way; that's important to remember. In most ways he's just like everyone else. He laughs, cries, gets excited, gets depressed, needs friends, likes music, enjoys food, watches television, learns and forgets and relearns – all the things that human beings do without moving their arms and legs.

But in some ways he's different – in ways that many of his peers consider most important. For example, he doesn't drive to a girl's house and take her out on a date. He's not likely to become a husband or a father. He didn't plan, ask for, or choose this situation. And he can't do anything to change it.

What would you do if you saw and heard someone laughing and making fun of the fact that he can't move? What would you think of someone who called him crude names for "paralyzed"? What do you think of the idea that if he were a decent person and really wanted to, he could straighten out and be "normal" like everybody else?

Finally, how would you feel if you knew he was beginning to believe the insults and becoming convinced that he's pretty worthless – even a bad person?

Now let's talk about another likeable, talented young person. Let's call him Bill. He could easily be a classmate of the first young man. Because of something he didn't choose either, Bill is also different from most people in one way: He's gay.

Many people would have problems with that opening example. I'll admit that it's very imperfect.

Many gay people would be upset about being compared to someone who's paralyzed. "Being paralyzed is a tragic loss," they would say. "Being gay is not tragic and it's not a loss. It's a different but equally good way of being a person." That's the strong pro-gay position.

Some heterosexual, or “straight” people would object to the example but for different reasons: “When a person is paralyzed, that’s a shame. When a person is gay, that’s disgusting.” That’s the strong anti-gay position.

The comparison is intended only to illustrate two aspects of being gay which are easy to forget but important to remember. First, gay people do not make a deliberate choice about their sexuality. Straight people don’t either. A person’s sexual orientation is not like checking out a Camaro and a Mustang and then choosing one or the other. Second, gay people are far more *like* everyone else than they are different.

Like the first young man, Bill did not design or choose this situation. And he can’t do anything to change it. But if people find out that Bill is gay, he won’t get waves of sympathy and understanding. From many people he’ll get a lot of the opposite. Even if he doesn’t act on his feelings – *even if he doesn’t do anything sexual at all* – many people will treat him worse than if he cheated on exams, robbed a store, did drugs – or all of those. You know what he’s heard on the bus and in the corridors at his high school.

Like the first young man, Bill is far more *like* others than different. But to many people, his one difference makes all the difference.

So he tells no one. He forces a laugh along with the rest of the group when he hears things like, “Did you hear the story about the fag who...” and, “There were these two lesbians, see, and one morning...” He laughs to keep up appearances, but it’s about as funny to him as a gift-wrapped baseball glove would be to the young man who’s paralyzed.

Inside he’s confused and hurt. He can’t change his feelings and they seem normal to him. But almost everybody says those feelings are sick, dirty, evil, almost too bad for words. So he’s often very angry too, without knowing who should be the target of his anger. Himself? His parents or other people in his background? His classmates and society in general? God?

### **What do we know?**

This article is about homosexuality – being gay. That’s not a comfortable topic for many people; we often laugh at and put down things that are uncomfortable.

But let’s decide to make putdowns and crude laughter off-limits. Like many straight people, I used to tell jokes about “queers.” I used to tell jokes about black people and people who get drunk and people of other nationalities and women drivers, too. Now I’m sorry that I did. They’re all cheap shots.

In spite of considerable study and research, there is no definite conclusion or even much agreement about what causes homosexuality. Some recent research seems to be leaning in the direction of genetics. It may be similar to the way some people are born with a genetic disposition toward being left-handed or right-handed. For right now, the cause makes little difference. We’re concerned with how to approach the facts and the situation as Catholic Christians.

It used to be assumed that homosexuality affected only a very few, very sick, very dangerous people. It was assumed that these people would try to take sexual advantage of nearly anyone of their own sex whom they could, especially children. It was assumed that their moral character was so warped they couldn't be trusted to make good decisions of any kind.

None of this is true. About 10 percent of people – that's more than a very few – are basically homosexual. They don't feel huge waves of sexual passion every time they look at or touch someone of the same sex, any more than straight people instantly want to go to bed with persons of the opposite sex they see or hug. Recent studies show that most child molesting – including young boys – is done primarily by *heterosexual* people. And gay people have responsibly filled just about every occupation there is, including professional football.

Some people, especially in their teens, think they're gay or suspect they may be, when they aren't. The following are *not* proof of being gay: 1) Strong feelings of friendship and affection toward others of the same sex. These are actually a sign of healthy emotional development; 2) Isolated homosexual experiences. These can happen out of pressure from the other person, out of curiosity, even out of loneliness; 3) Not dating the opposite sex. Many people simply do not develop an active social life until much later than others.

### **Is it wrong?**

“But isn't homosexuality wrong? I don't mean just different. I mean *sinful*. Isn't that what the Bible says and what the Church teaches?”

Christians, straight or gay, must consider sexuality in the light of God's word. That's not picking on sex. Christians are called to look at *everything* – politics, poverty, business, human rights, the media, *everything* – in the light of God's word.

Beyond question, most religious traditions have not approved of homosexual actions. We need to be clear on what that means, what it doesn't mean, and why.

First of all, it does not give straight people reason to feel superior and self-righteous. (“God likes us straight people because we're normal: he can't stand you sickos.”) That's using God to rate oneself above others – which is something God doesn't like. (The only people who prompted real fury from Jesus were those who figured they had it so together that God would see them as O.K. and others as inferior.)

The Catholic Church's teaching makes a big distinction between *being* homosexual in “orientation,” or sexual attraction, and *doing* homosexual actions. The Church clearly states that it's not sinful to *be* homosexual, to feel homosexual attractions. That's a condition beyond the individual's control. And *any* feelings, all by themselves, even strong sexual feelings, are neither right nor wrong. They're a bit like height and skin colour. They simply *are*.

Right and wrong are matters of *actions* – what we do or fail to do. Actions, of course, are often the *results* of feelings; but they're not the same thing as feelings.

A heterosexual person may feel that homosexual activity is so strange it *must* be wrong. But “strangeness” isn't enough to base a moral judgment on. A gay person is extremely concerned

with why the Church puts a “wrong” label on things which to him or her, don’t even seem strange.

### **Sex is strong stuff**

Every member of the Church should try to understand the current state of Church teaching on a matter which causes such publicity and such pain for so many people. To explain it in the space we have here isn’t going to be easy.

The Catholic tradition sees two purposes in human sexuality: One is the celebration and strengthening of love between husband wife; the other is the procreation of new human life.

Anyone who’s taken a junior high biology course knows that sperm cell + egg cell = baby. But the Catholic tradition says that this is more than a basic biological fact. It’s a clue, a message placed by God within human bodies, about one of the central purposes and the meaning of sex. The possibility of creating new life is not just an added feature of human sexuality – it’s part of it. Sex and its power to create new human life are linked together so closely that you can’t completely separate them over the long run. So a sexual relationship, Catholic tradition says, must be open to the creation of a new human life – and that’s impossible, of course, with homosexual sharing.

Moreover, in spite of recent media efforts to brainwash us into believing that sex is just another fun activity open to anybody, that’s not how Christians have regarded it down through 2000 years. Our heritage says that sex should be the expression of the total giving and sharing between two people who have promised themselves to each other forever. Most Christians see that promise as something which takes place between opposite sexes, a relationship we call marriage.

Catholic belief in particular regards marriage as more than even a very serious agreement between a man and a woman. The Catholic faith sees marriage, including married sexual love, as a sacrament, a relationship which literally makes Christ present. A relationship between two people of the same sex is not marriage, of course, and therefore it is unable to be a sacrament in that traditional sense.

The bottom line of Church teaching on gay sexual activity is simply: Don’t. Ever. This is called lifelong abstinence, or a celibate lifestyle.

Straight people have no problem with this because it affects them about as much as a traffic law passed by a city on the other side of the world. A few may even find satisfaction in it: “Serves ‘em right for being weird – they don’t deserve to have any fun.” In terms of Christian maturity, that attitude is still in spiritual diapers.

Many gay people of course will say it isn’t fair. Their feelings run somewhat like this: “Sex is not small stuff. The Church itself says that sex is one of the strongest, deepest elements of being human. But it’s off-limits to us.” We think it’s fine to *choose* to live without a sexual relationship in order to follow a life you feel called to, or feel is right for you. If you can handle that, whether you’re straight or gay, wonderful.

“But what if you *don't choose* to live without a loving, sexual fulfillment? What if you feel that it's something deep within you that can't simply be shut off? And we're not talking about cheap, one-night stands, or even six-month stands. We're talking about sex expressing genuine, permanently committed love.”

### **What's fair?**

They're right: It isn't fair at all if we believe that everyone has a right to the basic good things which God placed within creation and within human nature.

But another point of view would say that this is not a completely fair world – sexually and otherwise – and that gay people are not the only ones who are called to live without physical sex. So is everyone who isn't married. That includes a lot of straight people who would like to be married but, for whatever reason, haven't been asked or haven't found a partner.

And there are far worse injustices than having to go to bed without sex. Every night millions of people go to bed without shelter, without food, without freedom, without safety – and without hope for ever having them.

The young man in our opening example certainly has a right to walk and move. But he can't. His physical freedom to move has been taken away in most of his body. That's unfair – but it's also the way things are.

Church teaching says that just as he is not *physically* able or free to walk and move, gay people are not *morally* able or free to engage in sexual activity. Even though it may be unfair from a certain standpoint, that's also the way things are. Traditional spirituality also says that God will provide the strength for whatever difficulty anyone must bear.

One thing is certain: Hating and tearing apart must stop. If Jesus said something specifically about gay sex, the Gospels did not record it. But they recorded one thing after another which Jesus taught, both by word and by example, about accepting and loving other people. Jesus himself seemed to get along best with those whom polite, officially O.K. society regarded as scum and outcasts. Even when Jesus didn't accept someone's *actions*, he still extended acceptance and love to the *person*.

Some gay people need to learn acceptance too – of themselves. Since the world is mostly heterosexual, and because traditional Christian teaching on sexuality seems contrary to their feelings, it's easy to conclude that they really aren't very good human beings.

God holds all people responsible for their actions, sexual and otherwise. But God loves everyone – equally. God respects the dignity and worth of each person. Christians are called to channel and extend that love and respect to all people, “regardless of race, colour, creed, or national origin,” as we often say – and regardless of sexual orientation, too.

“Homosexuality: What's a Christian to Think?” by Jim Auer

**TURNING POINTS**  
**Readings in Family Life Education**  
**Sponsored by OCCB**  
**Prentice Hall Ginn Canada, 1997**  
**pp. 219-220**

Adolescence is a stage of development and change. It is a time for maturing and for discovering more about being male and female, and this process takes place over a number of years. It is not an easy task to move from childhood to adulthood, and young people have questions and worries along the way:

- Is it okay if you're not really interested in having a boyfriend or a girlfriend?
- Do some adolescents have strong feelings of attraction toward individuals of the same sex?
- If a person has an isolated sexual experience with someone of the same sex, does it mean that he or she is homosexual?
- If people tease you about your masculinity or femininity (e.g., call you a sissy, or a butch) does it mean there's something wrong with you?

There are short simple answers to these questions:  
 Yes, Yes, No, No. There is also a longer answer.

It is completely normal, especially during early adolescence, to feel most at ease with your own sex, and to find relationships with the opposite sex more stressful. This is one of the challenges of adolescence – to learn how to relate as a female to males, and as a male to females. This doesn't happen automatically; it takes time to understand new sexual feelings, the desire for friendship, and the need for intimacy. What's important is to be headed in the right direction.

Many different feelings, some of them very powerful, come and go during adolescence. The experience of being strongly attracted to someone of the same sex does not mean that the person is a homosexual. It's also important to remember that people are unique individuals. Some become quite interested in the opposite sex early in adolescence. Others develop casual friendships, but aren't interested in closer relationships until much later. And finally, all young people need to recognize that masculinity and femininity are not defined by a person's interests or way of behaving.

Not all adolescents have concerns about homosexuality, but most do have questions. In particular, they often wonder why some people are homosexuals.

The causes of homosexuality are not well understood. According to one theory, some people are born with a tendency to be attracted to their own sex. In other words, the cause lies in their genetic make-up. Another theory stresses the influence of the social environment, especially relationships with parents, other family members, and friends. Perhaps it is a combination of genetic and environmental influences. Whatever the cause, in most cases, homosexuality is not something that is deliberately chosen.

It is important to understand that to be attracted to a person of the same sex and to act on those feelings are not the same thing. It is not sinful to have homosexual tendencies, but sexual acts between people of the same sex are morally wrong. Like everyone else, homosexual people need acceptance, friendship, and love from others. In order to respect God's plan in creating us male and female, however, these relationships cannot include intimate sexual activity.

Because most people are heterosexual, that is, attracted to the opposite sex, homosexual people find themselves living in a world where they are "different." This can cause much confusion and pain. Also, homosexuals are often treated in ways that are cruel and deeply disrespectful – name-calling, stereotyping, or assuming that they are not unique individuals who need love and friendship in their lives, as all people do.

As Christians, we are called to treat others with the respect that is owed them as persons whom God created and loves. We all need to recognize that God's plan for us is mysterious. Each person has challenges in life that can seem overwhelming. Like everyone else, homosexual people need committed friendships, a deep belief in God's love, and the support and prayers of the Christian community. Many who are trying to live as good Christians struggle with their sexual feelings and their desire for physical intimacy. Yet all of us, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are called by God to be chaste and to honour the gift of sexuality.

*Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops*



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*Homosexuality and the Catholic High School: A compilation of newsletters with new material*, (2001) contains stories from Catholic students, educators, parents, guidance counsellors, and chaplains. Available from John Podgorski, Coordinator, Religious Education and Family Life Education, Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board, 570 West Hunt Club Road, Nepean, Ontario, K2G 3R4. Tel: 613-224-4455.

*The Joke's Over: Student to Student Sexual Harassment in Secondary Schools* contains materials for supervisory officers, principals, vice-principals, teachers, staff, students, and parents/families. For additional information, contact Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation at 1-800-267-7867, Ontario Women's Directorate at 416-314-0351, or Violence Prevention Secretariat at 416-325-2578.

Bell, Alannah. *Creating Safe, Nurturing and Inclusive Communities for All. Focus: Gay and Lesbian Persons. Starting Point for Reflection*. Waterloo. Waterloo Catholic District School Board, 2003.

United States Catholic Conference. *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*. (Washington, DC: USCC, 1991). Contains perhaps the most sensitive official summary of church teaching on homosexuality.

### Video Resources

*Bully No More: Stopping the Abuse*, 2000 : IMS Multimedia.

*Names Can Really Hurt Us* : WCBS-TV.

*Prejudice: A Big Word for a Little Kid*, 1991 : KSTP-Television.

*The Truth about Hate*, 1999 : AIMS Multimedia.

*The Unbiased Mind*, 1995 : Learning Seed Company.

### Websites

<http://www.k-j-s.com/silent/silentLegacy2.html>

<http://www.k-j-s.com/scarecrow/scarecrow.html>

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## **INVITATION TO RESPOND**

As you work through this document at the local level, we encourage you to note any additions or changes that might improve its quality.

Please send your suggestions to:  
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