

The mission of the Church is to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to all people and to minister to all people in his name. In our time and culture, special challenges are faced by those Church members who carry out this mission among persons who experience same-sex attraction. There are many forces in our society that promote a view of sexuality in general, and of homosexuality in particular, not in accord with God's purpose and plan for human sexuality. To offer guidance in the face of pervasive confusion, the United States Bishops issued *Ministry to Persons with Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care* in 2006. The following is an excerpt:

Homosexual Inclination Is Not Itself a Sin

While the Church teaches that homosexual acts are immoral, she does distinguish between engaging in homosexual acts and having a homosexual inclination. While the former is always objectively sinful, the latter is not. To the extent that a homosexual tendency or inclination is not subject to one's free will, one is not morally culpable for that tendency.

Although one would be morally culpable if one were voluntarily to entertain homosexual temptations or to choose to act on them, simply having the tendency is not a sin. Consequently, the Church does not teach that the experience of homosexual attraction is in itself sinful.

The homosexual inclination is objectively disordered, i.e., it is an inclination that predisposes one toward what is truly not good for the human person.¹ Of course, heterosexual persons not uncommonly have disordered sexual inclinations as well. It is not enough for a sexual inclination to be heterosexual for it to be properly ordered. For example, any tendency toward sexual pleasure that is not subordinated to the greater goods of love and marriage is disordered, in that it inclines a person towards a use of sexuality that does not accord with the divine plan for creation. There is the intrinsic disorder of what is directed toward that which is evil in all cases (*contra naturam*). There is also the accidental disorder of what is not properly ordered by right reason, what fails to attain the proper measure of virtue (*contra rationem*).²

It is crucially important to understand that saying a person has a particular inclination that is disordered is not to say that the person as a whole is disordered. Nor does it mean that one has been rejected by God or the Church. Sometimes the Church is misinterpreted or misrepresented as teaching that *persons* with homosexual inclinations are objectively disordered, as if everything about them were disordered or rendered morally defective by this inclination. Rather, the disorder is in that particular *inclination*, which is not ordered toward the fulfillment of the natural ends of human sexuality. Because of this, acting in accord with such



Catholic Teaching on Homosexuality Respecting Human Dignity

an inclination simply cannot contribute to the true good of the human person. Nevertheless, while the particular inclination to homosexual acts is disordered, the person retains his or her intrinsic human dignity and value.

Furthermore, it is not only sexual inclinations that can be disordered within a human person. Other inclinations can likewise be disordered, such as those that lead to envy, malice, or greed. We are all damaged by the effects of sin, which causes desires to become disordered.

Simply possessing such inclinations does not constitute a sin, at least to the extent that they are beyond one's control. Acting on such inclinations, however, is always wrong.³

Many in our culture have difficulty understanding Catholic moral teaching because they do not understand that morality has an objective basis. Some hold that moral norms are nothing more than guidelines for behavior that happen to be widely accepted by people of a particular culture at a particular time. Catholic tradition, however, holds that the basis of morality is found in the natural order established by the Creator, an order that is not destroyed but rather elevated by the transforming power of the grace that comes to us through Jesus Christ. Good actions are in accord with that order. By acting in this way, persons fulfill their authentic humanity, and this constitutes their ultimate happiness. Immoral actions, actions that are not in accord with the natural order of things, are incapable of contributing to true human fulfillment and happiness. In fact, immoral actions are destructive of the human person because they degrade and undermine the human dignity given us by God.

¹ See CCC, no. 2358.

² See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, no. 3.

³ Circumstances may affect the degree of culpability in individual cases, but to will homosexual acts is always wrong. "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 behavior of homosexual persons is always and totally compulsive and therefore inculpable" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, no. 11).

The Necessity of Friendship and Community

One way in which the Church can aid persons with a homosexual inclination is by nurturing the bonds of friendship among people. In their analysis of human nature, the ancient philosophers recognized that friendship is absolutely essential for the good life, for true happiness. Friendships of various kinds are necessary for a full human life, and they are likewise necessary for those attempting to live chastely in the world. There can be little hope of living a healthy, chaste life without nurturing human bonds. Living in isolation can ultimately exacerbate one's disordered tendencies and undermine the practice of chastity.

It would not be wise for persons with a homosexual inclination to seek friendship exclusively among persons with the same inclination. They

should seek to form stable friendships among both homosexuals and heterosexuals. . . . A homosexual person can have an abiding relationship with another homosexual without genital sexual expression. Indeed the deeper need of any human is for friendship rather than genital expression.⁴

True friendships are not opposed to chastity; nor does chastity inhibit friendship. In fact, the virtues of friendship and of chastity are ordered to each other.

The virtue of chastity blossoms in *friendship*. It shows the disciple how to follow and imitate him who has chosen us as his friends (cf. Jn 15:15), who has given himself totally to us and allows us to participate in his divine estate. Chastity is a promise of immortality.

Chastity is expressed notably in *friendship with one's neighbor*. Whether it develops between persons of the same or opposite sex, friendship represents a great good for all. It leads to spiritual communion.⁵

While the bonds of friendship should be carefully fostered at all levels, loving friendships among the members of a family are particularly important. Those ministering in the name of the Church should encourage healthy relationships between persons with a homosexual inclination and the other members of their families. The family can provide invaluable support to people who are striving to grow in the virtue of chastity.

The local Church community is also a place where the person with a homosexual inclination should experience friendship. This community can be a rich source of human relationships and friendships, so vital to living a healthy life. In fact, within the Church human friendship is raised to a new order of love, that of brothers and sisters in Christ.

Growth in Holiness

While human friendship is indeed necessary for the good life of a human person, friendship with God constitutes our ultimate end. Every human person has been created to share in the communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Church to persons with a homosexual inclination must always have the overriding aim of fostering the greatest possible friendship with God, participation in the divine life of the Trinity through sanctifying grace.

Integral to friendship with God is holiness. God is holy and all who would come near to God must likewise become holy.⁶ ... The Church seeks to enable every person to live out the universal call to holiness. Persons with a homosexual inclination ought to receive every aid and encouragement to embrace this call personally and fully.

The pervasive influence of contemporary culture creates, at times, significant difficulties for the reception of Catholic teaching on homosexuality. In this context, there is need of a special effort to help persons with a homosexual inclination understand Church teaching. At the same time, it is important that Church ministers listen to the experiences, needs, and hopes of the persons with a homosexual inclination to whom and with whom they minister. Dialogue provides an exchange of information, and also communicates a respect for the innate dignity of other persons and a respect for their consciences.

PASTORAL RESOURCES

Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006, <http://www.usccb.org/dpp/Ministry.pdf>

Courage, an apostolate of the Roman Catholic Church that ministers to those with same-sex attractions and their loved ones, <http://couragerc.net/>

4 National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pastoral Research and Practices, *Principles to Guide Confessors in Questions of Homosexuality* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1973), 11.

5 CCC, no. 2347. See Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, no. 17: "Chastity is the joyous affirmation of someone who knows how to live self-giving, free from any form of self-centered slavery. This presupposes that the person has learned how to accept other people, to relate with them, while respecting their dignity in diversity. The chaste person is not self-centered, not involved in selfish relationships with other people. Chastity makes the personality harmonious. It matures it and fills it with inner peace. This purity of mind and body helps develop true self-respect and at the same time makes one capable of respecting others, because it makes one see in them persons to reverence, insofar as they are created in the image of God and through grace are children of God."

6 See Lv 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 1 Pt 1:16. See Mt 5:48; Lk 6:36.