



Strategies for Making Gay and Lesbian People and Their Families Feel Welcome in Your Parish

1. Ensure General Hospitality For All

How hospitable is your parish – for anyone and everyone? If your parishioners do not feel welcome, anyone on the margins of the church will surely not feel welcome.

2. Break the Silence

In the document, “Always Our Children”, the authors write, “When speaking publicly, use the words, ‘homosexual,’ ‘gay,’ and ‘lesbian’ in honest and accurate ways.” Use of these words by people in ministerial roles gives “permission” for others to talk about gay and lesbian loved ones and related issues. Put documents like “Always Our Children” in the Church vestibule or other areas of your parish community. Ensure that brochures and other fliers for known ministries regarding Gay and Lesbian issues in your Diocese are available. Post flyers and other information regarding activities events sponsored by these ministries as well.

3. Ensure Consistency Among Groups

How does your parish treat other groups? Divorced or separated people? Divorced people who have married without an annulment? Unmarried, cohabiting heterosexual, young or old? People with non-Catholic spouses? Are gay and lesbian people, individual or couples, and their families treated the same as others who may feel marginalized by the church? Or is there a double standard?

4. Listen

Understand objections. Discern what is lack of information (which requires education) versus irrational belief (which requires change of heart). Make an extra effort to listen to people who believe they are not being heard.

5. Pray

Include prayers around events of injustice, hate crimes, or other acts of intolerance toward gays and lesbian people. As weekly prayers of the faithful are being developed ensure that the scope is broadened so that petitions are inclusive (ex, praying for all relationships that experience struggles or difficult times). Include Gay and Lesbians persons, homophobia, or other sexual orientation issues when appropriate when praying for issues of justice.

6. Homily Development

As you are preparing a homily broaden reference points about issues that you might be discussing. For example, when making reference to injustices make sure to include the wrongs of discrimination based on sexual orientation. When speaking about the marginalized or other alienated individuals, include gay and lesbian persons with other groups. When making reference to spouses or families, use terms like “one’s beloved” or “household”. This will make other people feel included and welcomed such as engaged couples, good friends, etc.

7. Don’t Confuse Issues

Focus on inclusion as the goal and don’t be distracted by other issues.

8. Be Patient

You may never know who is lesbian or gay, or who has a loved one who is. The important thing to remember is that one must always be sensitive to that possibility. Understand that no matter how insignificant an effort seems, how few people it seems to reach, or how unresponsive your effort appears, you never know how the efforts you have made have touched individuals and that the efforts will make a difference.



Helpful Things to Know When Ministering with Persons with a Homosexual Orientation, or with Their Families

1. Ministry is with people; you are not dealing with an abstract issue.
2. Even if only three percent of people are gay, a diocese with 350,000 Catholics has more than 10,000 Catholic gay and lesbian people. You probably already minister with Catholic gay and lesbian people and their families, whether you know it or not.
3. Having a homosexual (or heterosexual) orientation is not a sin. “Such an orientation in itself, because not freely chosen, is not sinful.” (U.S. Bishops, *Human Sexuality*, 1991, pg. 55).
4. “Human sexuality, a core dimension of the human need to need love and to be loved, is a gift from God” (U.S. Bishops, *Human Sexuality*, 1991, pg. 13). “Sexual identity helps to define the unique person we are, and one component of our sexual identity is sexual orientation” (U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Marriage and Family, *Always Our Children*, pg. 7)
5. “Scientific evidence does not show that conversion therapy (trying to change a person’s sexual orientation) works...it can do more harm than good.” (American Psychological Association, *Answers to your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality*, undated brochure).
6. “Like heterosexual persons, homosexual men and women are called to give witness to chastity, avoiding with God’s grace, behavior that is wrong for them, just as non-marital sexual relations are wrong for heterosexual men and women.” (U.S. Bishops, *To Live in Christ Jesus*, 1976, #52)
7. “Circumstances may exist...which would reduce or remove the culpability of the individual in a given instance (Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, #11) “Imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, and other psychological or social factors.” (Catechism, #1735)
8. “Although we can judge that an act is in itself a grave offense, we must entrust judgment of persons to the justice and mercy of God.” (Catechism, #1861) “Humankind looks at appearances, but God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7)
9. “A Human being must always obey the certain judgment of his (or her) conscience. If he (or she) were deliberately to act against it, he (or she) would condemn him (her) self.” Catechism, 1800).
10. “Homosexual persons should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights. They have a right to respect, friendship and justice. They should have an active role in the Christian community.” (U.S. Bishops, *To Live in Christ Jesus*, 1976, #52, and *Human Sexuality*; 1991, p. 55).
11. The Catholic Catechism’s definition of Chastity: #2337 Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man[sic. woman] in his bodily and spiritual being.

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Contemporary Theological Reflections on Homosexuality

John McNeill

Through the lenses of scriptural interpretation and psychological insight, McNeill argues that, in justice, the Church needs to abandon its traditional opposition to committed, sexually active lesbian or gay relationships. He proposes, “The same moral norms should be applied in judging the sexual behavior of a true homosexual as we ordinarily apply to heterosexual activity.” Additionally, he argues that “there is the possibility of morally good homosexual relationships and that the love which unites the partners in such a relationship, rather than alienating them from God, can be judged as uniting them more closely.”

Charles Curran

Curran argues that the Church should not morally disapprove of loving, committed, sexual relationships between two people of the same sex. Curran sees this as a compromise position, because he views the heterosexual orientation as the ideal for human beings. The Church, however, needs to make allowances for those who do not meet the heterosexual norm. Curran has also pointed out that the procreative element of marriage has been eroded by Church teaching itself. With the allowance of natural family planning methods in *Humanae Vitae*, the Church has not kept procreation as an indispensable requirement of all sexual activity. By allowing heterosexual couples to regulate their sexual activity with their fertility cycles, Catholic teachings, in fact, has acknowledged that the reproductive element is not as important as it once was.

Rosemary Radford Ruether

Through feminist analysis Ruether points out that the idea of complementarity, key to the Church’s teaching on marriage and sexuality, is based on the idea that men and women have distinct “essences” and that they need each other for completion. Complementarity “demands that continued dependency and underdevelopment of women in order to validate the thesis that two kinds of personalities exist by nature in males and females and which are each partial expressions of some larger whole. Such a view can allow neither men nor women to be whole persons who can develop both their active and their affective sides.”

Sister Margaret Farley, RSM

Farley observes that the church’s teaching on sexuality is based in an act-centered morality (i.e. what is judged good or bad is an activity). She proposes that the church adopt a relationship-centered morality (i.e. what is judged good or bad is the quality of the relationship between people). Principles such as free consent of the partners, equality between partners, a sense of commitment, and permanency, she argues, provide a better basis for evaluating the good in a partnership than the Church’s current teaching with its heavy biological emphasis.

Patricia Beattie Jung

From a feminist perspective, Jung notes that the magisterium’s view of the intimate connection between sexual activity and procreation only takes male biology into account. Additionally, she argues that the change in gender roles that has taken place in society and in the Church needs to be taken into account when discussing sexual morality. Mutuality, rather than complementarity, stresses equality between partners, each one sharing the gifts they have received as individuals.

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson

Robinson asks two critical questions: 1) Why are sexual sins considered offenses against God and not against people? 2) Why does the Church’s sexual morality have such little Biblical, and specifically New Testament, support? He proposes that the Church could develop a new sexual ethic from the Gospels by looking at the principles that Jesus taught about how people should treat one another.



Brief Timeline of Catholic Teaching On Homosexuality

1975: Vatican's Declaration on Sexual Ethics (*Persona Humana*)

- Recognition of homosexuality as part of a person's constitutional phenomenon, not activity
- Recognition of moral neutrality of homosexual orientation
- Awareness that homosexuality emerges in a person because of an "innate instinct."

1976-1986: In documents from national and regional bishops' conferences, diocesan pastoral letters and pastoral plans, we see a development of new areas of Church teaching: a call for pastoral ministry for lesbian / gay people, a defense of their civil and human rights, and a condemnation of prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes and practices directed against homosexual people.

1986: Vatican's Letter to Bishops on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons

- Definition of homosexual orientation as "objective disorder"
- Warning that 1975's Declaration was interpreted too positively
- Affirmation that pastoral care for lesbian / gay persons be encouraged
- Condemnation of prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes and practices

1992: Vatican makes public its "Instruction to bishops, asking them to be cautious in their support of civil rights legislation for lesbian / gay people.

1986 – 1997: Development in U.S. of diocesan and parish ministries for lesbian / gay people. U.S. bishops reaffirm their earlier teachings on the goodness of lesbian / gay people.

1997: U.S. Bishops' Committee on Marriage and Family issues: *Always Our Children*

- Awareness that pastoral discussion of lesbian / gay issues needs to include outreach to parents and family members
- Encourages parental acceptance of lesbian daughters and gay sons
- Acknowledges that emotions are an avenue of God's voice
- Message to lesbian / gay people: "In you, God's love is revealed."
- Encourages development of diocesan and parish ministries.

1998: Vatican approves *Always Our Children* after making seven changes to the text.

2003: Vatican document *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons* denounces social and legal approval of same-sex marriage.

2005: Vatican "instruction" to bishops asking them to be cautious about accepting homosexually oriented men into the seminary. Includes a warning against church identification with "gay subculture".

2006: U.S. Bishops' Conference issues *Ministry to Person with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*.

- Most complete official explanation of the term "objective disorder"
- U.S. bishops drop their use of the term "orientation"
- Warning against identification with gay "subculture"
- Encouragement of dialogue on issue of homosexuality
- Calls for procedures to handle complaints about anti-gay discrimination



Common Terms and Definitions

Sexual Orientation:

A predominant and enduring emotional, romantic, sexual and affectional attraction to people of either gender or to both genders.

Homosexual Orientation:

A sexual orientation to people whose gender is the same as the person experiencing the orientation.

Heterosexual Orientation:

A sexual orientation to people whose gender is different from the person experiencing the attraction.

Bisexual Orientation:

A sexual orientation to people of both genders, not necessarily at the same time. Another definition is as a sexual orientation to people regardless of their gender.

Asexual:

An adjective to describe people who experience no sexual attraction to either gender.

Gay:

An adjective to describe a homosexual orientation or people, ideas, and things associated with a homosexual orientation. While it is mostly used in American English to describe males with a homosexual orientation, it is sometimes used to describe both males and females.

Lesbian:

An adjective to describe women with a homosexual orientation or ideas and things associated with them. It is sometimes used as a noun.

Straight:

An adjective to describe a heterosexual orientation or people, ideas, and things associated with a heterosexual orientation. It is usually thought of as a slang word, but is sometimes used in professional discourse as an accepted synonym for "heterosexual."

Transgender:

An umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity (sense of themselves as male or female) or gender expression (how they manifest that identity to themselves and others) differs from that usually associated with their birth sex. Transgender people may choose to dress, act, and present themselves as a particular gender part-time or full time.

Transsexual:

A transgender person who wishes to live full time as members of the gender opposite to their birth sex. Some of them undergo biological alteration (hormone therapy, surgery) to make their bodies as congruent as possible with their preferred gender.

Transvestite or Cross-dresser:

A person who regularly wears clothing of the opposite gender. The motivations for this action are varied: to express transgender feelings, for fun and amusement of themselves and / or others, for emotional comfort, for sexual arousal. Most are biological males who are sexually attracted to women.

Homophobia:

A form of bigotry. A negative attitude, judgment, or evaluation of lesbian / gay persons; hostility or dislike of lesbian / gay persons based on their homosexual orientation. It may be based on fear, but it may also have other bases.

Internalized Homophobia:

Homophobia felt by gay / lesbian persons themselves – internalized from a culture that stigmatizes lesbian / gay persons. Self-loathing as a response to one's homosexual orientation.

Heterosexism:

An ideology that denies, denigrates and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual forms of behavior, relationships, or identity.

Intersex:

An adjective to describe persons whose biological sex cannot be classified as either male or female. This indetermination may be the result of having been born with both male and female genitalia, or features of both sets of genitalia, or ambiguous genitalia.

Queer:

An adjective which was predominantly used as a derogatory term in decades past, but is now sometimes used to describe any person whose gender or sexuality does not align with one's biological sex or a heterosexual norm.
