



## **POLICY FOR YOUTH EXPERIENCING SAME SEX ATTRACTION OR GENDER IDENTITY ISSUES**

- 1. Pastoral Perspective:** Young people are typically challenged to define themselves in a number of ways. They begin to determine academic goals, vocational choices, recreational preferences, and the like as they develop friendships, date, ally themselves with various groups, take political stances, and form more mature religious commitments. In the midst of these processes of growing up, they are also developing their personalities and their sexual identities. Persons who minister to them—particularly pastors, youth ministers, teachers and principals—must be sensitive to the sometimes volatile ways in which youth self-identify while also guiding them in accordance with the wisdom of the Church.

We are aware that youth are very much influenced by media and current trends in society as they seek to find their place in the world. They are also very much affected by peer pressure—positively and negatively. In the midst of sometimes confusing and contradictory influences, young people require patience and compassion from those who minister to them.

- 2. Relationship with the Church Community:** The consistent teaching of the Church has been that feelings of attraction or uncertainty about gender identity are far different from action. We encourage young people dealing with same-sex attraction to remain in close relationship with the Church community, to frequent the sacraments, to take advantage of available spiritual direction, and to seek to live a chaste life.

The same can be said of those experiencing uncertainty about their gender identity. They should be advised that “sex change” treatments or surgeries are not permissible in the Catholic medical ethical tradition. The understanding of the Church is that a person’s gender is determined by what is noted on birth and baptismal certificates. Biological sex is the norm for determinations of group membership and facility use. Those experiencing gender identity issues should be advised to seek both pastoral and medical advice.

We are aware that youth are not always discreet about self-disclosure, which can result in concerns among their peers and the parents of their peers. Therefore, we recommend these steps for parish and/or school groups.

### **3. Specific Policies for Young People Who Have Disclosed Feelings of Same-Sex Attraction (SSA):**

- A.** If a person discloses same-sex attraction to a parish leader or school employee or reveals such on social media, the situation calls for the exercise of prudence. The young person should be advised to seek reliable spiritual counsel.
- B.** The obligation to report to parents or others occurs if and when: 1) there is concern that a student is a suicide risk; 2) there is an indication that a student has been involved with pornography; 3) the student indicates that he or she has been initiated into homosexual activity by an adult—which, of course, requires reporting to DSS and the Office of Child Protection Services.
- C.** In the case of overnight trips, the traditional practice with youth group, high school, pro-life and other similar trips is to house two or more students of the same gender in shared rooms. Students are told to bring their own sleeping bags. They may, in some cases, end up with four students in a room with two queen beds, but they sleep in their own sleeping bags and have the option of sleeping on the floor.

If concerns arise about a student who has identified himself or herself as experiencing SSA, young people and, as needed, their parents should be reminded that chaperones are on hand and are obligated to address and report any inappropriate behavior (whether related to drugs, alcohol, sex, fighting, or other) which is reported to them. There is also a possibility of assigning a student a room by himself or herself, if needed, but this should be handled sensitively so that the young person does not feel embarrassed, excluded or shunned.

### **4. Specific Policies for Young People Experiencing Gender Identity Issues:**

- A.** Biological sex is the determinant when single-sex groups are involved.
- B.** Rest rooms, locker rooms, showers, and other facilities that may be designated for a particular sex are to be used only by those who are of that biological sex. If this becomes an issue, in a school or parish setting, an accommodation may be made so that a student is permitted to use a single-stall bathroom, a unisex bathroom, or a faculty/employee restroom.
- C.** In the case of overnight trips, young people are assigned rooms according to their biological sex. As above, when this creates tension for the young person or for others, it may be advisable to request a private room for a person experiencing gender identity issues. As in the case of SSA, this is to be handled with great sensitivity.

### **5. Attitudes Toward Adults with These Issues**

Individuals with SSA who are, to our knowledge, living a chaste life are welcome to volunteer or serve in various capacities in Church life. As appropriate, they should be made aware of the existence of the Courage movement in our diocese.

Those who are living with partners in an admittedly active sexual relationship or have entered into a same-sex marriage must be advised that they cannot take a role which is seen as representing the Church. If the parent of a child in a parish or diocesan school or youth group attends activities, programs, performances, etc., he or she and the partner should be treated with respect.

Given the growing need, the diocese seeks to develop resources which will assist people who have family members who consider themselves transgender or as experiencing SSA, as well as Catholics who have siblings, children, or parents who have entered into same-sex marriages or same-sex relationships or who have identified themselves as transgender.

## **7. Resources:**

**Catechism of the Catholic Church**, articles 364, 1934-1936, 2207, 2210, 2223, 2297, 2333, 2357-2359, 2393, 2521-2523.

**Episcopal Commission for Doctrine of the Canadian Conference of Bishops**, "Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction," June 2011.

**Sacred Scripture**, particularly Gen 1:26-31; Gen 2:18-25; 1 Cor 6:15, 19-20; 1 Cor 7:1-11; Heb 13:1-8.

**Shaughnessy, Sister Mary Angela, SCN, J.D., Ph.D., and Michael L. Huggins, Ed.D., ARNP, FAANP**, "Transgender, Sex and Gender: Legal and Medical Issues," *Momentum*, Winter 2016, pp. 48-51.

**USCCB**, "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care," 14 November 2006.

**USCCB, Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage**, "'Gender Theory'/'Gender Ideology' Resource, 19 October 2015.

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