



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF MEMPHIS

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Policy on Matters of Gender Identity **Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee**

I. Preface

“The truth will set you free.”¹ Christ’s words to his disciples call Christians in every age to embrace the truth of who we are as children of God, for only in embracing this truth can we be set free. This is Christ’s promise to which Catholics assent with mind and heart, and this promise is the foundation of the Church’s moral teachings.

The Second Vatican Council stated that, “inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served. To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.”²

Each generation presents moral challenges to which the Church must respond as mother and as teacher.³ It is ever the duty of the Church both to listen patiently to the struggles of her children and also to instruct them clearly on the path to the fullness of life and freedom.⁴ As St. Paul VI writes, “It is an outstanding manifestation of charity toward souls to omit nothing from the saving doctrine of Christ.”⁵ In the past decade, there has been increased attention paid to gender dysphoria and gender discordance, especially among young children and adolescents, coupled with the widespread notion that the solution to such dysphoria is to affirm one’s “experienced gender” over and against one’s biological sex. This prompts the Church to provide catechesis and policy for all the faithful, and especially for Church employees, personnel, and all others who work, volunteer, or attend school in parishes, organizations, and institutions of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee.

II. Catechesis

¹ John 8:32.

² Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, 3-4.

³ St. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et magistra*, 1.

⁴ St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis splendor*, 4; Congregation for Catholic Education, “‘Male and Female he Created Them’: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education,” Vatican City, 2019, 30.

⁵ St. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae vitae*, 29.

2.1 The Church teaches that the human person, created in the image and likeness of God, is a “unified creature composed of body and soul.” The soul is the spiritual principle of each human person and the “subject of human consciousness and freedom.”⁶ Yet man is truly himself only “when his body and soul are intimately united.”⁷ The human person is not a soul or a mind that has a body merely as a biological accessory. Rather, the human person is a body formed by a soul.⁸ Human life and love are “always lived out in body and spirit,”⁹ and thus the body is a “vital expression of our whole being.”¹⁰ So integral, in fact, is the body to who we are as human beings that the body and soul together are fashioned and “destined to live forever.”¹¹ The creed expresses a belief in the “resurrection of the body,” the belief that all persons will “rise again with their own bodies which they now bear.”¹² The body which will one day rise is the very body which each person received as a gift and in which each person lives out his vocation to holiness.¹³

2.2 Our biological sex, expressed by our body, is a gift from God and is unchangeable. A person’s biological sex is expressed in and through the body. It cannot be changed because it is bestowed by God as a gift and as a calling, and “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.”¹⁴ Biological sex is a gift because in the very act of creation, God bestows upon each human person a biological sex—“Male and female he created them”¹⁵—two sexes that are different, equal, and complementary.¹⁶ It is a calling because we work out our salvation via our masculinity or femininity. In other words, human persons do not experience the freedom and joy of salvation despite their biological sex, but only in it and through it.

2.3 A person’s “gender” is inseparable from biological sex. The Catechism states that “Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul.”¹⁷ Therefore, while biological sex and “gender”—or the socio-cultural role of sex as well as “psychological identity”¹⁸—can be distinguished, they can never be separated.¹⁹ Should someone experience a tension between biological sex and “gender,” they should know that this interior conflict is not

⁶ Glossary of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000.

⁷ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est*, 5.

⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 76; St. John Paul II, General Audience of October 24, 1979; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 365.

⁹ Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen fidei*, 34.

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est*, 5.

¹¹ St. John Paul II, Message to Health Workers, Phoenix, Arizona, 1987.

¹² Fourth Lateran Council (1215), DS 801.

¹³ St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 5.13.1; International Theological Commission, *Some 14 Current Questions in Eschatology*, 1992, 1.2.5.

¹⁴ Romans 11:29.

¹⁵ Genesis 1:27.

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 355, 369.

¹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2332.

¹⁸ DSM-5, 451.

¹⁹ Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio finalis* (24 October 2015), 58; Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, 56.

sinful in itself²⁰ but rather reflects “the broader disharmony caused by original sin”²¹ and often results from the residue of social ills and cultural distortions of what constitutes “masculinity” and “femininity.” Such persons should be treated with respect and with charity, and “no one should suffer bullying, violence, insults, or unjust discrimination” based on such experiences.²² However, charity “needs to be understood, confirmed, and practiced in the light of truth,”²³ and thus such persons should be encouraged to seek harmony between their biological sex and “gender” not through a rejection of one or the other, but through turning to Christ and to all that the Church provides. Only by turning to Christ can one acknowledge and accept one’s sexual identity in every aspect—physical, moral, social, and spiritual²⁴—and only through such an acceptance can the human person in turn experience the freedom promised by Christ.

2.4 Respect for creation is also a respect for one’s biological sex. As Pope Francis writes, “It is enough to recognize that our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it, and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek ‘to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it.’”²⁵

III. Policy

The following policy seeks to provide guidance in applying the Church’s moral teachings regarding the challenges presented by “gender theory.” This policy is put forth for parishes, schools, and ministries of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee.

²⁰ In Catholic moral theology, the term “disordered” has a particular meaning which may not be identical with how the term is used by psychologists and medical professionals. According to the Catholic moral tradition, every inclination, desire, and action is ordered to some particular purpose or end (i.e., consuming medicine is ordered toward health; sexual relations are ordered toward unity between spouses and procreation; etc.). Any inclination, desire, or action which impedes this purpose is considered “disordered” (i.e., the inclination to take medicine in order to commit suicide; or engaging in contraceptive sexual relations). Since the purpose of the body (as given by God) and the soul is to be united forever in the presence of God, an inclination which disrupts this unity—such as an experienced tension between natal sex and “gender”—would be considered “disordered.” Note well that it is the inclination, desire, or action that is disordered, not the inherent dignity of the person. On the relationship between the concept of “disorder” and the dignity of the person, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2358 and the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona Humana: Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*.

²¹ Diocese of Arlington, “A Catechesis on the Human Person & Gender Ideology,” August 12, 2021.

²² Congregation for Catholic Education, “‘Male and Female He Created Them’: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education,” Vatican City, 2019, 16.

²³ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, 2.

²⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2333.

²⁵ Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si’*, 155.

In all interactions and policies, parishes, schools, and ministries are to recognize only a person's biological sex. This policy applies, but is not limited to, all Church employees, personnel, volunteers, students, and those entrusted to the care of the Church, including all contracted vendors when they are on-site and may have contact with those entrusted to the care of the Church.

3.1 Designations and Pronouns. Any parochial or ministries documentation which requires the designation of a person's sex is to reflect that person's biological sex. No person may designate a "preferred pronoun" in speech or in writing, nor are parishes or ministries to permit such a designation. Permitting the designation of a preferred pronoun, while often intended as an act of charity, instead promotes an acceptance of the separability of biological sex and "gender" and thus opposes the truth of our sexual unity.

3.2 Bathrooms and Locker Rooms. All persons must use the bathroom or locker room which matches their biological sex. Parishes, schools, and ministries are permitted to have individual-use bathrooms which are available for all members of the respective community.

3.3 Attire. All persons are to present themselves in a manner consistent with their God-given dignity. Where a dress code or uniform exists, all persons are to follow the dress code or uniform that accords with their biological sex.

3.4 Athletics and Extra-Curriculars. Participation in parish, school, and extra-curricular activities must be conformed with the biological sex of the participant. Some sports and activities may be open to the participation of individuals of both sexes.

3.5 Single-Sex Schools, Buildings, and other Programs and Institutions. Admission to single-sex programs, including but not limited to single-sex schools, camps, and retreats, is restricted to persons of the designated biological sex. Dormitories or other single-sex buildings are restricted to persons of the designated biological sex.

3.6 Medication. In Catholic parishes, schools, and ministries, no person is permitted to have on-site or to distribute any medications for the purpose of gender reassignment. Also, students and those entrusted to the care of the Church are not permitted to take "puberty blockers" or cross-sex hormones, even if self-administered, on parish or school property, with the purpose of a potential or actual "gender reassignment."

3.7 Policy Violations

3.7.1 Employees. Violation of this policy by any employee may include immediate corrective action, suspension, and possible termination of employment.

3.7.2 Volunteers. Violation of this policy by any volunteer may include immediate corrective action, suspension, and possible termination of volunteer status.

3.7.3 Students & Parents. A student who insists, or whose parents insist, on open hostility toward or defiance of Church teaching, or who otherwise intentionally violate this policy, may be expelled from the school.

3.8 Protecting the Vulnerable. Those entrusted to the care of the Church who express a tension between their biological sex and their “gender” and others directly affected by this tension (parents, guardians, etc.) should be directed to appropriate ministers and counselors who will help the person in a manner that is in accord with the directives and teachings of the Church. Parishes, schools, and other Catholic ministries should take the necessary precautions, in accord with the policies of this document, to avoid bullying and to protect the integrity of those who may express tension or concerns about their biological sex.

In prudently implementing this policy, the circumstances of a case could be so particular that it may demand the advice of experts. Some specific cases may not find an answer in this document. Any questions should be directed to the Office of the Bishop.

Select Teaching Resources on Gender Theory and Gender Ideology from the USCCB can be found at:
https://www.usccb.org/resources/Gender-Ideology-Select-Teaching-Resources_0.pdf