

PASTORAL GUIDE

Regarding Policy §650 Gender Identity

Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

This guide is intended as a commentary to help foster a proper understanding of the diocesan policy regarding gender identity, in recognition of the pastoral sensitivities regarding this matter.

I. Gender Dysphoria, Transgenderism, and the Pastoral Imperative of Compassionate Concern

Gender dysphoria is a real psychological condition, in which a biological male or female believes he or she is the opposite gender. It is of paramount importance to handle such situations with gentle and compassionate pastoral skill and concern. All forms of discrimination and harsh treatment must be strongly resisted and corrected. It is also important to recognize the difficulties parents and families face when a child or family member is dealing with gender dysphoria. This disorder affects the entire family. In a culture that promotes a false and overly sentimentalized conception of love, many families of an adult or child with gender dysphoria will feel a sense of obligation to support their loved one in “whatever is going to make them happy.” Family members likely wrestle with a sense of confusion, guilt, and uncertainty over how best to support their loved one; and they face pressure, either directly or indirectly, from the prevailing culture to celebrate and reinforce their loved one’s gender dysphoria and feel compelled to “solve” the problem by surgically and hormonally changing the biological sex of the affected person. Such treatments, especially for children, are invasive and disruptive physically, chemically, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually.

For the parents of a child who is dealing with this condition, the first priority must be to assist the child in this difficult situation. Fueling the confusion that families face in these circumstances is not merciful. For the sake of the family and the loved one, it is imperative to be clear on the reality of human biology as a gift from God that we cannot change. In this regard, Pope Francis has questioned whether “the so-called gender theory is not an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution” (General Audience, April 15, 2015).

The Holy Father’s concerns are grounded in the Church teaching that our identities as male and female are part of God’s good design in Creation, that our bodies and sexual identities are gifts from God, and that we should accept and care for our bodies as they were created. A person cannot change his or her gender. A person should accept and seek to live in conformity with his or her sexual identity as determined at birth. The human person is a body-soul union, and the body – created male or female – is a constitutive aspect of the human person. Therefore, the Catholic Church teaches that the removal or destruction of healthy sexual and reproductive organs is a type of mutilation and intrinsically evil. Procedures, surgeries, and therapies designed to assist a person in “transitioning” his or her gender are morally prohibited. “Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity. Physical, moral, and spiritual difference and complementarity are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out.” See Catechism of the Catholic Church

(“CCC”), §2333. “Each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way.” See, CCC §2335.

With this teaching in mind, gender dysphoria can be reasonably compared to anorexia. Each is a condition in which a person, for a complex set of reasons, has a self-perception of his or her physical biology that is dislocated from reality. Just as it would be pastorally reckless to provide weight-loss resources to a visibly gaunt anorexic who thinks she is overweight, it is equally reckless to encourage someone with gender dysphoria to undergo hormone treatment and/or genital mutilation.

None the less, the presentation of this truth must be made with love, compassion, and patience. As the policy itself states, our schools, parishes and other institutions embrace with compassion those families and individuals with gender dysphoria and patiently supports them in their journey. However, it must be clear that our schools and Church institutions (including sacramental records and school records) will refer to such persons with the gender pronouns, along with bathroom and locker room use and sports activities that acknowledge their God-given biology. Some families may not be willing to agree with this approach, and we need to respect their freedom; but they must likewise respect the Church’s duty to adhere to revealed truth if they are to participate actively and fully in our faith community, especially our Catholic schools.

II. The importance and timeliness of a policy regarding gender dysphoria and Transgenderism

Given the gravity of concern regarding gender dysphoria and transgenderism, in particular for our young people, the Congregation for Catholic Education of the Holy See recently published a thorough and important study and directive of guidance on this matter, entitled “Male and Female He Created Them”

(http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19_0997_INGLESE.pdf).

This document was developed, in part, due to the increased pressure on Catholic schools and other institutions through the courts and legislatures, requiring schools to allow boys who believe they are girls to use girls’ restroom and locker room facilities and play on girls’ sports teams, and vice versa. Many public schools have begun to implement such policies. In a notable case in Illinois, news coverage included a teenage girl in tears on television over her discomfort with the fact that a biological boy was being allowed to change with her and other girls in the girls’ locker room. Her comments reflect the concerns of many parents and children:

“For me, the idea of this proposal scares me,” she said during the public comment session. “When I get out of practice from a long, tiring workout, I do not want to see a transgender student naked in the locker rooms. I do not want my privacy invaded against my will. I am just one girl, in the midst of an entire district, but I have feelings too and am against this policy.”

Some have shared concerns that the diocesan policy mistakenly assumes adults would use children as pawns in such a political scheme, but the evidence is clear that such activism is well underway in the State of Illinois. In fact, in some cases, parents are submitting their children to hormonal therapies at pre-pubescent ages in order to prepare for sexual transgender surgeries later.

Viewed through a Christian lens, such cases amount to child abuse and genital mutilation. One may look to the United Kingdom for a glimpse of the trajectory of this trend. According to a report based on interviews with some of the 35 psychologists who left Britain's Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS), a report (*Transgender Children: Crisis in Care*) noted that the number of children referred to the GIDS rose from 77 in 2009-2010 to nearly 2,600 in 2018-2019, and there were 3,000 more children on a waiting list. In particular, the number of girls being referred to the GIDS has increased by 4,500% over that time. This trend presents moral, psychological, and physical dangers to our children.

The transgender policy is not, in and of itself, sufficient to address these threats; but it is necessary as a foundation of clarity and certainty regarding Church teaching regarding human biology, sexuality, and morality. Further, in an aggressively activist political climate — often fueled by social media — our pastors, principals, and administrators of parishes, schools, and affiliated groups and institutions deserve the clarity and protection of consistent diocesan policy on the matter of gender identity. Such policy protects our leaders from being forced to sort through these complex and sensitive matters reactively, under the pressure of inevitably sensitive situations. Such policy also protects our leaders at the local level from being pressured and intimidated on the basis of what is believed to be their own personal interpretation and opinion.

It is outside the scope of this document to provide concrete and detailed training on the skills required for pastoral conversations in such situations. However, resources are available to our priests through the Vicar for Priests and the Vicar General; and for school administrators through the Superintendent of Schools. Further, given the sensitivity and climate regarding these matters, our curial Office for Communications is available for consultation and/or direct support in situations that involve or portend the involvement of social media, secular media, and/or community relations. Pastors and administrators are strongly encouraged to solicit help when questions or situations arise regarding this policy.

A few examples of resources include:

Instructional Videos

This page (<https://canavox.com/dear-katy/category/transgender/>) includes a series of brief videos that can be useful instructional videos for staff, faculty, and parents on how to approach conversations about gender identity and transgenderism with both sensitivity and clarity. These may be used directly as resource for parents, or for help in training and preparing for conversations with others.

Male and Female He Created Them

This document, referenced above, was produced by the Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome: http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19_0997_INGLESE.pdf

Transgender Children: Crisis in Care

This study (*Transgender Children: Crisis in Care*), referenced above, is based on interviews with several psychologists who previously worked in the UK's Gender Identity Development Service. It highlights concerns and dangers of the trend toward accelerating gender dysphoria patients toward invasive transgender procedures.

§650 GENDER IDENTITY

The Church teaches that our identities as male and female are part of God's good design in Creation, that our bodies and sexual identities are gifts from God, and that we should accept and care for our bodies as they were created. A person cannot change his or her gender. A person should accept and seek to live in conformity with his or her sexual identity as determined at birth. The human person is a body-soul union, and the body – created male or female – is a constitutive aspect of the human person. Therefore, the Catholic Church teaches that the removal or destruction of healthy sexual and reproductive organs is a type of mutilation and intrinsically evil. Procedures, surgeries, and therapies designed to assist a person in "transitioning" his or her gender are morally prohibited. "Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity. Physical, moral, and spiritual difference and complementarity are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out." See Catechism of the Catholic Church ("CCC"), §2333. "Each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way." See, CCC §2335.

§650.1 General Policy Concerning Gender Identity

While the Church has a duty to teach the truth about the human person (anthropology) and human sexuality, and incorporate this teaching into her policies and procedures, the Church has compassion and empathy toward all her members who suffer from confusion about their identity, including their sexual or gender identity.

650.1. Policy It is the policy of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois that all Catholic agencies, including parishes, schools, institutions, departments, or other entities, shall respect the biological sex with which a person is born and shall apply all policies and procedures in relation to that person according to that person's biological sex at birth.¹

¹ An "agency" as used herein shall include any department, institution, office, parish, school, Juridic person or any subdivision thereof governed by the moral authority of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Springfield in Illinois. (The authority to determine policies for these entities is stated in the, **2017 Diocesan Synodal Statutes, Part I, General Norms #9**, "Diocesan policies further specify and delineate in greater detail the fundamental particular laws of these statutes and require all diocesan, parish and Catholic school personnel to act in a prescribed manner in handling specified situations. Diocesan procedures are uniform methods or standards of implementing diocesan policies.")

Procedures:

- a) While this policy is published in Book II, The People of God, it applies equally to the subject matters of the other Books. This policy applies to all interactions the Diocese or her agents have with any persons, whether said person is an employee, volunteer, student, or a general member of the faithful.
- b) The Sacramental and Liturgical Life of the Church will also reflect this policy in as much as it corresponds with the moral teachings of the Church and the provisions of Canon Law.
- c) Examples of this policy in practice include the following:
 - 1. All persons will be addressed and referred to with pronouns in accord with their biological sex;
 - 2. All correspondence, documents, and records will reflect the subject person's biological sex;
 - 3. All persons will use bathrooms and locker rooms that correspond with their biological sex while on Diocesan or Parish property.
- d) The Diocese also supports and encourages counseling for those who suffer from or are diagnosed with gender dysphoria by licensed counselors or other medical professionals who hold a correct Christian anthropology of the human person and who understand and adhere to Catholic teaching.
- e) While the Catholic Church does not support transgender therapies and/or surgeries that assist a person in "transitioning" his or her gender, the Church recognizes that appropriate medical care may be necessary in rare cases of true genetic or physical anomalies, such as hermaphroditism or intersex.

§650.2 Specific Policy Concerning Employees and Volunteers

650.2. Policy Employees and volunteers are expected to live virtuous lives guided by Gospel values and the teaching of the Church. Employees and volunteers shall conduct themselves in accord with their biological sex at all times. Likewise, all employees and volunteers shall perform their duties, and tailor their interactions with other persons, in accord with the Diocese's general policy concerning gender identity (§650.1).

Procedures:

- a) Examples of this policy in practice include the following:

1. All employees and volunteers will be addressed and referred to with pronouns in accord with their biological sex;
 2. All employee or volunteer correspondence, documents, and records will reflect the employee's or volunteer's biological sex;
 3. All employees and volunteers will use bathrooms that correspond with their biological sex while on Diocesan or Parish property.
- b) Violation of this policy by any employee may include immediate corrective action, suspension, and possible termination of employment.
- c) Violation of this policy by any volunteer may include immediate corrective action, suspension, and possible termination of volunteer status.

§650.3 Specific Policy Concerning Students

650.3. Policy Students and their parents are expected to live virtuous lives guided by Gospel values and the teaching of the Church as described in the Family School Agreement (**BK3§404.1**). Students shall conduct themselves in accord with their biological sex at all times.

Procedures:

- a) A student diagnosed with gender dysphoria should not be denied admission to a Catholic school as long as the student and his or her parents agree that the child will abide by the Family School Agreement and this policy.
- b) Respectful, critical questioning of Catholic teaching in the classroom is encouraged as long as its intent is to help the student progress toward greater awareness and understanding.
- c) Examples of this policy in practice include the following:
1. All students and their parents will be addressed and referred to with pronouns in accord with their biological sex;
 2. All school correspondence, documents, and records will reflect the student or parent's biological sex;
 3. Students will participate in competitive athletics in accord with their biological sex;
 4. Catholic schools will not allow, or otherwise cooperate in, the administration of puberty-blocking or cross-sex hormones on school property;

5. All students will use bathrooms and locker rooms that correspond with their biological sex. Students who have been clinically diagnosed with gender dysphoria, however, may request the use of a single-person, unisex facility. Such requests will be assessed on an individual basis by the appropriate school administrator.
- d)** A student of any Catholic school 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 pursuant to this policy and the provisions of **BK3§404.1.3**.