



DIOCESE OF SUPERIOR

PASTORAL GUIDANCE REGARDING GENDER DYSPHORIA

Dear friends, may no adversity paralyze you. Be afraid neither of the world, nor of the future, nor of your weakness. The Lord has allowed you to live in this moment of history so that, by your faith, his name will continue to resound throughout the world. (Benedict XVI)

In the past decade, there has been increased attention paid to gender dysphoria, 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 guidance for all the faithful, and especially for Church employees, personnel, and all others who work in parishes, organizations, and institutions of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Superior.

The purpose of this document is to respond to the need in the Church and the world to pastorally accompany the growing number of those experiencing a deeply seated disconnect between their biological sex and their gender identity. These individuals and their families experience this as a trial which is isolating and painful and deserves accompaniment. We must help those who experience gender dysphoria know they have a home in the Church.

God communicates his greatest truths through signs. He gives his Body and Blood under the signs of bread and wine. This sacramental worldview challenges us to see created realities in a similar light. When we see a body, what is the body a sign of? The creation account in Genesis demonstrates to us what God has created our bodies for. We are created in God's image and likeness and destined for holiness: we are destined with the help of God's grace for heaven.

Pope Francis highlights this in his encyclical *Laudato Si*, "Man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will... 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 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" (155).

Again, Pope Francis reiterates in *Amoris Laetitia*, "Biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated. It is one thing to be understanding of human weakness and the complexities of life, and another to accept ideologies that attempt to sunder what are inseparable aspects of reality. Let us not fall into the sin of trying to replace the Creator. We are creatures, and not omnipotent. Creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift. At the same time, we are called to protect our humanity, and this means, in the first place, accepting it and respecting it as it was created" (56).

Giving and receiving in love is the way the world was created from the beginning. This appeal to the beginning is what guides the Church's reflection both on the meaning of the body and of its understanding of sexual differences (i.e. gender). Sexual difference is not an accidental part of creation but part of how God created man and woman from the beginning. It is not a concept which is subject to reinterpretation. It is to be received according to God's intention and plan for humanity.

God created sex in the context of an intimate union of persons from the beginning. The marriage covenant was ratified by Christ and elevated to the dignity of a sacrament. It is in marriage that man and woman express their undivided commitment toward one another in sacrament and in the giving and receiving of one another in bodily intimacy. This is the paradigm for sexual intimacy. This intimacy which finds its proper context in the commitment of man and woman in marriage is an expression of sexual, bodily, psychological, and emotional complementarity.

Christ expresses in his dialogue with the pharisees that Moses allowed divorce and remarriage because of the hardness of their hearts, but that “from the beginning it was not so” (Mt 19:8). Christ’s appeal to the beginning expresses his key for interpreting sexual acts and so the original innocence of the garden is the paradigm for sexuality. In the beginning sexual intimacy was free from the inner lack of shame, it expressed the complementarity of men and women, and was an expression of the exclusivity of the relationship, “My beloved is mine and I am his” (Song 2:16). I am not to blame merely for having desires contrary to Christ’s appeal to the beginning; rather the issue lies when acting upon them.

Those experiencing gender dysphoria experience attractions and desires to sexual acts outside of the context of a monogamous heterosexual relationship. Those who experience these desires or feelings are called to recognize that these acts are not determinative of who they are. A person who identifies principally based on these desires, attractions, and feelings and acts upon them acts against God’s plan for sexuality. We are made for more. We are not the sum of our desires, attractions or feelings. Through God’s grace, we are made for holiness in every aspect of our humanity and especially in the realm of sexuality.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. We are made for love (*Gaudium et Spes*, 24).
2. We are called to holiness and to live the life of discipleship in Jesus Christ (Mk 1:15; *Guadete et Exultate* 1; CCC 1).
3. We are body and soul from the beginning (Gn 5:2).
4. God created human beings male and female (Mt 19:3-6; Mk 10:6; Gn 2:22-23). “The soul of man and his relation to God cannot be separated from the bodily expression of this identity. One’s gender is determined by one’s biological sex; there can be no separation between the two” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 56).
5. We are made for heaven. “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Mt 6:33). “I am coming again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, *there* you also will be” (Jn 14:3).
6. We experience the daily effects of Original Sin creating in us desires contrary to God’s plan. “For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another” (Gal 5:17; CCC 385).
7. We are called to live in our bodies in a way in keeping with the dignity of our body and soul. Sexual acts contrary to God’s plan for sexuality are not in keeping with human dignity (*Amoris Laetitia*, 56).
8. All are called to live chastity, the virtue that orders sexual desires (CCC 2239). Chastity allows us to love better and to become better witnesses to God’s love for the world. Living a chaste life is for every person, so that they can live the freedom of the children of God. What we do in my body has an effect on our soul.
9. Guidance must be given to help each individual improve in all Christian virtues – that “habitual and firm disposition to do good” (CCC 1833).
10. “Keeping God’s law in particular situations can be difficult, extremely difficult, but it is never impossible. This is the constant teaching of the Church’s tradition” (*Veritatis Splendor*, 102). Departure from the Church’s teaching, or silence about it in an effort to provide pastoral care is neither caring nor pastoral. Love and truth go together. The Sacred Scriptures tell us that the way to grow more Christ-like is by “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15).
11. All efforts to accompany all people, young and old, must recall the intrinsic dignity of the human person (*Gaudete et Exultate*, 112).
12. And finally, all pastoral care is defined, primarily, by love. It is the duty of those who find themselves in positions of ministry to communicate the deep love of Christ to all. Ultimately, all pastoral care is aimed at guiding people toward a relationship with Jesus Christ (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14).

GUIDANCE

With decisions regarding gender dysphoria in parishes, organizations, and institutions of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Superior, the following should be followed:

1. Conversations regarding a person struggling with gender dysphoria will be considered confidential, unless there is a risk of harm to self or others. Details will only be shared with essential personnel. In the event a special accommodation for a minor would impact other students, it may be necessary to include other parents/guardians in the conversation. This conversation should not take place without the consent of the requesting parents/guardians.
2. Persons experiencing gender dysphoria “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided” (CCC 2358).
3. Discussion with parents and students both before admission and during enrollment should include an agreement to abide by the policies set by the parish or school. While critical thinking, listening, and dialogue is encouraged between parties, open hostility or dissent from Catholic teaching necessitates a pastoral response to the family. Continued hostility or defiance of the parish and/or school policies may indicate the family is not a proper fit. Admission will not be denied to students experiencing gender dysphoria.
4. In all interactions and policies, all individuals will be recognized by their biological sex and will recognize others by their biological sex. This applies to, but is not limited to, all Church employees, personnel, volunteers, and those entrusted to the care of the Church.
5. Individuals will always be addressed by their legal name or registered nickname and must correspond to their biological sex. Individuals will also be referred to with pronouns in accord with their biological sex. Sacramental records, official records, ID cards, and correspondence of Catholic parishes and schools will reflect the student’s legal name or registered nickname and biological sex. No person may designate a “preferred pronoun” in speech or in writing, nor are parishes or schools 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.
6. Catholic parishes, schools, and institutions will not allow or otherwise cooperate in the administration of puberty blocking or cross-sex hormones on school and parish property. To the degree possible appropriate counseling recommendations for students to address behavioral and mental health concerns will be made available. Catholic parishes and schools will not provide therapy or referrals to mental health providers who do not uphold Catholic teaching in their practices.
7. Individuals will conduct themselves in accord with their biological sex on parish and school campuses as well as during parish and school sponsored activities off campus. This applies to restrooms, dress code, athletics, single sex small groups, housing at overnight events, dates for parish sponsored functions, etc.
8. 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.
9. All clubs or programs sponsored by a Catholic parish or school are expected to uphold Catholic teaching.
10. Groups which advocate for privileges not in accordance with Catholic teaching will not be allowed to function on parish, school, or other Catholic institutions property, or to be sponsored off campus by parish and school staff.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Gender/Sex: A person’s biological category, male or female, based on reproductive organs. These terms are often synonymous; however, with the advent of gender theory, the term ‘gender’ has come to mean, “the way in which the differences between the sexes are lived in each culture..., dependent upon the subjective mindset of each person.” To avoid confusion, this document uses the term ‘biological sex.’ (*Male and Female*, 11)

Gender Dysphoria: Involves a conflict between a person's physical gender/sex and the gender with which they identify. People with gender dysphoria may be very uncomfortable with their biological sex, sometimes described as being uncomfortable with their body (particularly developments during puberty) or being uncomfortable with the expected roles of their assigned gender. People with gender dysphoria may often experience significant distress and/or problems functioning associated with this conflict between the way they feel and think of themselves and their physical gender.

Gender Affirmation: Any treatment with the goal of reducing symptoms of gender dysphoria with the aim to affirm the gender as stated by the individual. This may include psychotherapeutic, medical, or surgical treatments.

Chastity: All people, whether married or single, are called to chaste living. (CCC 2348) Chastity is a call to love well and to love according to the truth (*Made for Love*, 102). Chastity allows us to love better and to become better witnesses to God's love for the world. 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. (*Pastoral Care*, 10)

RESOURCES

Each individual circumstance may need specific guidance and advice. Below are resources to learn more, as well as, assistance in following this guidance.

- USCCB, [Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care](#) (2006)
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, "[Chastity and homosexuality](#)," nos. 2357-2359
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons](#) (1986)
- Fr. Michael Schmitz Video:
 - [The Transgender Question](#)
 - [The Third Way](#)
 - [Why God Gave Us Bodies](#)
- [Courage](#) is a Catholic apostolate for persons with same-sex attraction
- [EnCourage](#) is a ministry within Courage dedicated to the spiritual needs of parents, siblings, children, and other relatives and friends of persons who have same-sex attraction
- [Eden Invitation](#) is a resource of speakers and blog posts from individuals who have experiences same-sex desires but have chosen to live as God has intended.
- Ethics and Medics is a publication of the National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC):
 - [A Critique of "Gender Dysphoria" in DSM-5](#)
 - [The Incoherence of Gender as a Social Construct](#)
 - [Actual Human Persons Are Sexed, Unified Beings](#)
 - And other articles from NCBC - <https://www.ncbcenter.org/bioethics-resources>

QUESTIONS

For questions on the implementation of these guidelines:

- ➔ In Religious Education and Catholic Schools please contact, Peggy Schoenfuss, pschoenfuss@catholicdos.org
- ➔ Regarding Canon Law please contact, Rev. James Tobolski, jtobolski@catholicdos.org
- ➔ Regarding the contents of this guidance and Catholic morality please contact, Rev. Adam J. Laski alaski@catholicdos.org
- ➔ Regarding families please contact, Loree Nauertz, lnauertz@catholicdos.org.

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Most Reverend James P. Powers

CITATIONS

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