

Information For and About **Gay and Lesbian Catholics**

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Gays and Lesbians in the Catholic Church

Many Catholics, including gay and lesbian Catholics themselves, are confused or misinformed about the status of gay and lesbian persons in the Catholic Church. As a result, many gay and lesbian Catholics fail to participate as fully as they can in the spiritual and sacramental life of the Church, and many Catholic communities fail to welcome and embrace gay and lesbian Catholics as fully as they should.

If you are a gay or lesbian Catholic, the first thing you should know is that gay and lesbian persons are always welcome in the Catholic faith community.

- A gay or lesbian Catholic who is living a chaste single life is a Catholic in good standing, and is entitled to participate fully in the spiritual and sacramental life of the Catholic faith community.
- A gay or lesbian Catholic who regularly engages in sexual activity or is a partner in a committed personal relationship which includes regular sexual relations is considered a member of the Church living outside the boundaries of a chaste single life. Like a heterosexual person under these circumstances, they are entitled to participate in a limited way in the spiritual and sacramental life of the Church.

Catholic teaching makes important distinctions between a homosexual person, same-sex attraction, and homosexual actions:

- The Church affirms the dignity and value of every human being, regardless of sexual orientation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* insists that homosexual persons “must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity” (#2358).

The U.S. bishops have written: “Nothing in the Bible or in Catholic teaching can be used to justify prejudicial or discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.”

- Some Church documents (but not the *Catechism*) describe same-sex attraction as “objectively disordered.” This is the Church’s way of saying that same-sex attraction tends to seek fulfillment in sexual acts which fall short of the creative meaning and purpose of human sexuality as given by God and ordered to God’s creative purpose.

The U.S. bishops point out that a homosexual attraction is not in itself sinful, and God does not love a person with a homosexual orientation less than a person with a heterosexual orientation.

- * The Church considers homosexual acts “intrinsically disordered.” This is because, contrary to the natural law, they “close the sexual act to the gift of life” and “do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity” (*Catechism* #2387).

This is the reason why homosexual Catholics, like unmarried heterosexuals, are called to a life of chastity, which limits the legitimate exercise of sexual relations to men and women in a sacramental marriage. It is also the reason why the Church does not recognize gay civil unions as sacramental marriages.

The Church believes that gay and lesbian Catholics can and should grow in Christian perfection by the practice of the Christian virtues, chaste friendships, prayer and the reception of the sacraments (#2358, 2359).

“We stretch out our hands to our homosexual brothers and sisters.... Though at times you may feel discouraged, hurt or angry, do not walk away from your families, from the Christian community, from all those who love you. In you God’s love is revealed. You are always our children.”

-- U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Marriage and Family,
Pastoral Letter, *Always Our Children* (1997).

Your Participation in the Church

A Guide for Gay or Lesbian Catholics

These guidelines apply as a general rule. You should visit with a pastor, pastoral minister or confessor about your personal circumstances.

Gay or lesbian Catholics who are not engaging in sexual relations are living a chaste life and are members in good standing of the Catholic Church. They are free to participate fully in the spiritual and sacramental life of the Catholic faith community.

For example, if you are gay and are living a chaste life, you may...

- attend Eucharist and receive Holy Communion unless otherwise impaired by serious sin.
- celebrate the Sacraments of Penance, Confirmation and Anointing of the Sick.
- have a Catholic funeral and be buried in a Catholic cemetery.
- serve as a baptism sponsor (*Godparent*), Confirmation sponsor, or official witness at a Catholic marriage.
- serve as a liturgical minister, such as lector, communion minister, hospitality minister, musician or cantor.
- serve on the pastoral council or parish committees and boards.
- have your children baptized and enroll them in a Catholic school or religious education program.
- serve as a catechist in religious education programs or as a teacher in a Catholic school.

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Like heterosexual persons, gay or lesbian Catholics who occasionally violate the virtue of chastity should consider the nature of the activity, the particular circumstances under which it took place, and their general behavior and intention before deciding to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance.

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Gay or lesbian Catholics who regularly engage in sexual activity or are partners in a committed personal relationship or civil union which includes regular sexual relations are considered members of the Church living outside the boundaries of a chaste single life. They are free to participate in some but not all aspects of the Catholic faith community.

For example, if you are a gay or lesbian Catholic who regularly and intentionally engages in sexual activity, you may...

- attend Mass, but not receive Holy Communion or have a civil union recognized as a sacramental marriage.
- participate in communal celebrations of Reconciliation and, if you wish, visit privately with a priest in Confession about your spiritual life or your status in the Church.
- celebrate the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick when in danger of death.
- have a Catholic funeral and be buried in a Catholic cemetery.
- participate in the public spiritual and social life of the parish, but not serve in public ministries or leadership positions.
- have your children baptized and enrolled in a Catholic school or religious education program.
- serve as an official witness at a Catholic marriage, but not as a catechist, teacher, Godparent or Confirmation sponsor.

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The Church is an inclusive community. We do not generally expect individuals to reveal personal information which is secondary to our common identity as sisters and brothers in Christ. As a gay or lesbian Catholic, you are free to discern to whom and under what circumstances you wish to acknowledge your sexual orientation.

What the U.S. Bishops Have Said About Being Gay and Catholic

Excerpts from Always Our Children--A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers published in 1997 by the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Committee on Marriage and Family Life.

Homosexual Orientation. A common opinion of experts is that there are multiple factors—genetic, hormonal, psychological—that may give rise to [a homosexual orientation].... Generally, homosexual orientation is experienced as a given, not as something freely chosen. By itself, therefore, a homosexual orientation cannot be considered sinful, for morality presumes the freedom to choose....

God's Love For All. God loves every person as a unique individual.... God does not love someone any less simply because he or she is homosexual. God's love is always and everywhere offered to those who are open to receiving it.

The Gift of Sexuality. ...[S]exuality is a gift from God. Being created a male or female person is an essential part of the divine plan, for it is their sexuality—a mysterious blend of spirit and body—that allows human beings to share in God's own creative love and life.

The Virtue of Chastity. ...[E]veryone is called to practice the virtue of chastity.... Chastity means integrating one's thoughts, feelings, and actions in the area of human sexuality in a way that values and respects one's own dignity and that of others.... To live and love chastely is to understand that "only within marriage does sexual intercourse fully symbolize the Creator's dual design, as an act of covenant love, with the potential of co-creating new human life."

Homosexual Behavior. ...[I]t is God's plan that sexual intercourse occur only within marriage between a man and a woman [and that] every act of intercourse must be open to the possible creation of human life. [Because] homosexual intercourse cannot fulfill these two conditions...the Church teaches that homogenital behavior is objectively immoral, while making the important distinction between this behavior and a homosexual orientation, which is not immoral in itself.

Respect for Human Persons. The teachings of the Church make it clear that the fundamental human rights of homosexual persons must be defended and that all of us must strive to eliminate any forms of injustice, oppression, or violence against them.... Nothing in the Bible or in Catholic teaching can be used to justify prejudicial or discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.

The Faith Community. ...[A]ll homosexual persons have a right to be welcomed into the [faith] community, to hear the word of God, and to receive pastoral care. Homosexual persons living chaste lives should have opportunities to lead and serve the community. However, the Church has the right to deny public roles of service and leadership to persons, whether homosexual or heterosexual, whose public behavior openly violates its teachings.

Read the complete text of the bishops' statement online at <http://goo.gl/2ZXZoh>

How we can help...

The Catholic community in Waterloo is eager to encourage and support our brothers and sisters who are gay and lesbian. We invite gay and lesbian Catholics to participate as fully as possible in the spiritual and sacramental life of the Catholic faith community.

We encourage you to...

- Choose a local parish where you feel comfortable and attend Mass there regularly, even if you cannot receive Communion.
- Participate in listening sessions, faith-sharing groups, and other opportunities for spiritual enrichment and personal growth.
- Get involved in parish social concerns and social justice projects.
- Enroll your children in a Catholic school or religious education program.
- Develop a habit of regular prayer, study and devotion which allows you to reflect on God's love and care for you and your loved ones.
- Select a pastor, pastoral minister, confessor or spiritual guide with whom you can discuss your personal and spiritual growth on a regular basis.
- Ask us to help with Catholic family members or friends who have difficulty accepting you as gay or lesbian.

If you or someone you know is a gay or lesbian Catholic who is interested in discussing their relationship to, or participation in, the Catholic faith community, contact the parish staff or:

Director of Adult Faith Formation

Phone: 319-233-0498

Email: DBQwcaf@dbqarch.org