

OHIO CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
BISHOPS' RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ADVISORY STATEMENT NO. 1
CATECHETICAL STATEMENT

I. Pastoral Introduction

In foundational belief and practice, the Catholic Church affirms each and every human being, declaring that every person is created in the image and likeness of God. As such, every person deserves respect, dignity, and freedom from discrimination. Indeed, there is an inescapable duty to make ourselves the neighbor of all people, no matter who they are.¹ Further, the Church is obligated to pass on to every generation all that she has received from Jesus Christ, her divine founder, especially as it relates to our understanding of the human person in these present times.

Catechesis, which means “to echo,” is the echoing of the Good News of Jesus Christ, and the process through which disciples are formed in knowledge of the faith and the Catholic way of life. Through the catechetical process adults, youth, and especially children are assured of the unconditional love of God for each created individual, and are formed to give praise and glory to God through their lives.

Church teaching centered in Christ and rooted in a thorough understanding of Scripture, Christian anthropology, and theology, invites all of humanity to embrace a Catholic worldview in approaching various pastoral challenges. Understanding and relating to students who identify as transgender, presents a unique pastoral challenge to educators, parents, and all students present in Catholic schools.

II. Biblical Foundations

At the outset, it is important to clarify the basis of Catholic beliefs. The Catholic Church believes her teachings—and very existence—to be of divine origin and based upon the Word of God as it is articulated in Sacred Scripture and passed on by the living Tradition of the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth.

Regarding the question of human gender, the witness of Sacred Scripture is clear: God created human beings as male and female (Gen 1:27). From the dawn of creation as depicted in the Book of Genesis to the closing pages of the Apocalypse, Scripture presents the human race as consisting of only two genders. Both genders, male and female, are created in the image of God and are equal in dignity and destiny (Gen 2:21-24). God created Adam and Eve out of love and for love.

The entirety of divinely inspired Scripture affirms the male and female forms of human nature *as reality*. They are not mere cultural phenomena or subjective constructs. Rather, the male/female dynamic comprises the very structure and order of creation. Although wounded by the entrance of sin into human experience, man and woman continue to image God in both their uniqueness and complementarity. Scripture is clear on the necessity of respecting God’s order and commands for human beings to experience the fullness of life he intends. Scripture is likewise clear about the inherent consequences for disregarding God’s established order.

¹ *Gaudium et Spes* 27.

By God’s design, it is through their marital complementarity and bodily one-flesh union—and the fruit that it bears—that man and woman show forth a living icon of God’s inner life, love and fruitfulness. The fruit of this one-flesh love and union is the very means by which God ordained that the human race would multiply upon the earth (Gen 1:28).

III. Christian Anthropology

As recently articulated by Pope Francis, the clear and constant moral teachings of the Catholic Church have always envisioned a connection between our highest human happiness and our willingness to embrace the biological sex given us at birth.² Man and woman are integral parts of the self-giving gift of God in Creation itself, and are deemed by God to be “*very good*.”³ Our bodies thereby teach us profound truths about ourselves and our purpose in life. Our bodies signify that we are called to and gifted for relationships, that we are destined for eternal happiness and joy. Our bodies are God-given means of deepening our human generosity and communion with both God and each other.

Through reflection on the human body, on its origin, dignity, and purpose, Pope St. John Paul II believed we could learn God’s intention for our lives and ultimately find true love and happiness. This lucid understanding of human beings as taught by Pope St. John Paul II is known as the *Theology of the Body*. This teaching affirms that in our given biological complementarity, *as distinctly male and female*, God clearly intended us to live in loving communion with him and with each other. Through mutual self-giving and interdependence, he invites us to share in His own eternal happiness and joy.

Just as sacraments are outward and visible signs of inner and invisible realities, the same principle is operative in the biological signs of our human bodies. These, too, speak a “language.” Our God-given maleness and femaleness clearly make visible our calling to love and co-create with God in bringing new life into the world. This is what John Paul II calls *the “sacramentality of the body.”* Our bodies are “icons” that reveal the deepest essence of who we are in the moral, spiritual, emotional and physical dimensions of life.

“The body and it alone is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery of God...and thus be a sign of it.”⁴

For this reason, Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation on the family clearly specifies that the education of children *“should help them accept their own bodies and to avoid the pretension to cancel out sexual differences....”⁵*

Catholic teachings envision biological sex as neither a politically defined nor socially constructed reality.⁶ It is an objective reality, a cornerstone of our createdness, an invitation to enter joyfully and generously into what we believe to be the “central mystery of the Christian faith,” namely, that He is himself an “eternal exchange of love” emanating from the love shared between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁷

² Pope Francis, *Amoris Lætitia* 285.

³ Genesis 1:31.

⁴ Pope St. John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, February 20, 1980.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Amoris Lætitia* 285.

⁶ American College of Pediatricians, Gender Ideology Harms Children, <http://www.acpeds.org/the-college-speaks/position-statements/gender-ideology-harms-children>.

⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church 234, 221.

Summarizing this rich deposit of Christian anthropology, Pope Francis teaches that an authentically inclusive and tolerant view of the human being invites the acceptance of our bodies in their biologically male and female form.

IV. Theology

In consideration of this Biblical foundation and Christian anthropology, the Catholic school curriculum is developmental, sequential, age appropriate, and, above all, integrated throughout with Catholic theology. In the formation of all students, the following principles are introduced, reinforced, ongoing and periodically assessed for knowledge and understanding:

- God created all human beings in His image and likeness
- God loves all human beings; God invites all to respond to God’s love and grow in relationship with Him and with others
- God’s love for each person is unconditional.
- God, as the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, dwells in each person who perseveres in grace (justification).
- God gave each person dignity and the right to be respected with the responsibility to show respect to others
- God made us each with a body and soul inseparably joined
- God became human to show God’s love lived out in the world. God modeled for us how we are to love as he did
- God made us male and female
- God has given us the gift of our sexuality
- God made our human sexuality for love, mutual self-giving, and the procreation of children.

These theological principles are foundational to what Catholics believe, and are to be integrated into all subjects studied in Catholic schools, as appropriate.

V. Continuing Challenges and Implementation

The Catholic Church has always understood that her schools are more than places of academic learning; they are also an important part of the saving mission of the Church. In fact, the primary purpose of the Catholic school, its “distinctive feature,” is to create for the school community an atmosphere enlivened by the gospel spirit of freedom and charity. It aims to help the student in such a way that “the development of his or her own personality will be matched by the growth of that new creation which he or she becomes by baptism. It strives to relate all human culture eventually to the good news of salvation, so that the light of faith will illumine the knowledge which students gradually gain of the world, of life and of the human race.”⁸ Therefore, it is precisely in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, taking root in the minds and lives of students that the Catholic school finds its definition, and it is for this purpose that the Catholic Church establishes her own schools.⁹

The Catholic school community has a responsibility to be a witness of charity and justice based on the Gospel; and must always strive to be respectful and understanding of the diversity present within the student

⁸ Gravissimum Educationis 8

⁹ The Catholic School 8, 9

population. At the same time, Catholic schools must also be true to their own identity and mission. Thus the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding the true nature of human beings must permeate all aspects of a Catholic school's activities, academic and otherwise. It would be inconsistent with the school's identity and mission to teach, promote or encourage an understanding of the human person that is contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church, including but not limited to what has been articulated above. Nor can the Catholic school sponsor, facilitate or host such organizations, events or activities that would promote such views, either on or off campus, or through social media.

Young people must be encouraged to accept their own bodies and gender as they were created,¹⁰ and helped to recognize that the current attempts in our culture to redefine gender, and alter the nature and purpose of human beings, are misguided and not in accord with the truth. Finally, it would be morally unacceptable if Catholic schools were to provide accommodations based on notions of gender that are contrary to Catholic teaching, other than what would be necessary for the sake of safety.

To this end, Catholic school administrators at both the diocesan and school levels should make every reasonable effort to inform and instruct school personnel, parents, and students (where appropriate) concerning our schools' Catholic identity and those policies that relate to the cultural challenge of gender identity and gender ideology.

Archdiocese of Cincinnati Schools Office Gender Identity Policy

In Catholic Schools, all curricular and extra-curricular activity is rooted in and consistent with, the principles of Catholic doctrine. Catholic schools:

- ***Support students with gender dysphoria by treating them with sensitivity, respect, mercy, and compassion.***
- ***Require that participation on school teams be according to biological sex.***
- ***Require that names and pronouns be in accordance with the person's biological sex.***
- ***Designate Catholic sex education, uniforms and gender appropriate dress, bathrooms, locker rooms, showers, and sleeping accommodations on trips accommodations on trips according to biological sex.***
- ***Maintain names in school records according to the student's biological sex.***
- ***Provide reasonable accommodation to a private bathroom for use by any student who desires increased privacy.***
- ***In case of a specific request, consider in a compassionate way, on a case-by-case basis, the physical and psychological needs of a student based on the following questions:***
 - i. What is the specific request of the student and/or parents?***
 - ii. Is the request in keeping with the teaching of the Catholic Church?***
 - iii. Is the school reasonably able to accommodate the request?***

(Catholic Conference of Ohio, 2017)

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Amoris Lætitia* 56