

Archdiocese of Omaha Pastoral Guidelines on Gender Identity

Purpose

It is necessary to affirm, first and foremost, that “the dignity of the human person is rooted in [their] creation in the image and likeness of God.”¹ Image and likeness finds their expression in each of the two sexes as they provide an “image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way.”² Thus, male and female are unique and complementary in their physical and spiritual aspects.

Today, this reality of creation, sex, and gender is sometimes misunderstood and ignored. As those in positions of ministry strive to communicate the Gospel and draw young people closer to Jesus Christ, the Archdiocese of Omahadesires to support them by providing Pastoral Guidelines for accompanying young people experiencing gender dysphoria and/or incongruence in both our parish and school communities.

Guiding Principles

1. All efforts to accompany young people, especially in relation to human sexuality, must recall the intrinsic dignity of the human person. All men and women impacted by original sin are called by God to respond to his grace and conform their human nature to his divine image.
2. The witness of Sacred Scripture shows us that God created human beings male and female (Gen 1:27). Both sexes are created in the image and likeness of God, equal in dignity.
3. The study of one’s relation to God is rooted in the unity of body and soul. The soul of a human being and one’s relation to God cannot be separated from the bodily expression of this identity. Moreover, “biological sex and the sociocultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated.”³
4. 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.⁴ The Catholic community shall be a witness to the person of Christ and his Gospel, inviting everyone we meet to share in his divine life.
5. Because “Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children,”⁵ discussion regarding requests of a minor for accommodations regarding gender dysphoria must always include the parents or guardians of the child.

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1700.

² *Ibid.*, 2335.

³ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 56.

⁴ Pope St. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2223.

Application of Guiding Principles

Catholic parishes and schools in the Archdiocese of Omaha are encouraged to write policies which reflect these Guiding Principles. Locally adopted policies should be included in parish and school handbooks. Below are some examples of how these Guiding Principles apply.

These are not considered comprehensive, and situations may occur in parishes and schools which are not outlined below. All decisions made in these situations must reflect Catholic teaching.

1. **Confidentiality:** Conversations regarding a person struggling with sexuality will be considered confidential unless there is a risk of harm to self or others. Details will only be shared with essential parish and school personnel. The Parent/Guardian of the student will be brought into the conversation as soon as possible. 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 parents/guardians requesting accommodation.
2. **Bullying and Discrimination:** Persons experiencing gender dysphoria “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.”⁶ Refer to current parish or school guidelines for responding to bullying and harassment.
3. **Compliance:** 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 all parties, open opposition to or dissent from Catholic teaching necessitates a pastoral response to the family.⁷ Continued opposition to the parish and/or school policies may indicate the family is not a proper fit for the school or parish program.
4. **Admission Process:** Admission will not be denied to students experiencing gender dysphoria. Admission to single-sex schools will be based on the student’s biological sex.
5. **Counseling/Treatment:** Catholic parishes and schools will not allow or otherwise cooperate in the administration of puberty blocking or cross-sex hormones. By request, referrals for counseling or mental health treatment and/or supplemental resources may be made available at the financial responsibility of the family. Catholic parishes and schools will not provide therapy or referrals to mental health providers who do not uphold Catholic teaching in their practices.
6. **Names and Pronouns:** Students will always be addressed by their legal name or approved registered nickname⁸. Students will also be referred to with pronouns in accord with their biological sex. Official records, student schedules, ID cards, and correspondences of Catholic

⁶ CCC, 2358 (While this quote refers to the treatment of those experiencing Same Sex Attraction, the sentiment still applies in caring for people experiencing gender dysphoria).

⁷ Please see Guiding Principle #4

⁸ Parish and/or School Administration have the right to deny approving nicknames that are not gender appropriate and/or may be distracting to the environment.

parishes and schools will reflect the student's legal name or approved registered nickname and biological sex.

7. Student Conduct: Students 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.
 - a. This applies to Restrooms, Dress Codes, Athletics, Single Sex Small Groups, Housing at Overnight Events, Dates for Parish and School Sponsored Functions, etc.
8. Advocacy Groups: All clubs or programs sponsored by a Catholic parish or school are expected to uphold Catholic teaching. Groups which advocate for privileges not in accordance with Catholic teaching will not be allowed to function on parish or school property, or to be sponsored off campus by parish or school staff.

Definitions of Key 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.'⁹ To avoid confusion, this document uses the term 'biological sex.'

Gender Dysphoria: Involves a conflict between a person's physical gender/sex and the gender with which he or she identifies. People with gender dysphoria may be very uncomfortable with their physical gender, 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.¹⁰

Transgender: An umbrella term encompassing those whose gender identity or gender role differs from those typically associated with his or her biological sex.¹¹

⁹ "Male and female he created them" towards a path of dialogue on the question of *gender* theory in education (2 February 2019), Congregation for Catholic Education, 11.

¹⁰ Adapted from American Psychiatric Association Definition: <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria>

¹¹ Adapted from American Psychiatric Association Definition of Transgender: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2018/09/ce-corner-glossary>