

Gender Identity Guide and Policies

Diocese of Des Moines

This guide is intended as a commentary to help foster a proper understanding of policies of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Des Moines regarding gender identity, in recognition of the pastoral sensitivities regarding this matter, and the real and profound struggles individuals of good will face.

Prior to any policy the Diocese of Des Moines fervently hopes that all persons experiencing gender dysphoria know what the Catholic Church tirelessly affirms, that they are unconditionally loved by Jesus Christ and by the Church, and that they are vital members of the Body of Christ who have a home in the family of God.

The Church and Her Mission in Every Time and Place

The God who is love and who is revealed as a communion of persons has called humans, the only creatures after his own heart, to share fully in his love. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, in whom all persons are created (Colossians 1:15-16) as either male or female in God's image and likeness, became human like us in all things but sin (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus understands human nature well (John 2:25) and reveals us to ourselves. He invites us to share the abundant life gained by his death on the Cross (John 10:10). He helps us overcome the confusion and deception that ultimately stem from humans' original rejection of God's benevolence and care. Jesus does not condemn us; he saves us from ourselves. He restores us to relationships in community that heal the personal and social fragmentation we experience that would rob us of our sense of dignity, our love for ourselves and our neighbors, our hope for happiness and eternal life. The grace of Christ makes us whole within ourselves, and reconciles us to one another as one body in his name, that we might know peace (see Ephesians 2:14-16).

The same Lord Jesus greets every generation of humanity in all our social and political realities and announces to us the same message: "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). Authentic freedom resides in the choices we make and the communities we build if they rest upon the foundation of One who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6). The Church proclaims the truth of human dignity and authentic freedom revealed in Christ. Jesus entrusts the Church with the mission of drawing all persons to maturity within the fold of his mercy and Spirit-led love. In short:

the Church's mission derives not only from the Lord's mandate but also from the profound demands of God's life within us. Those who are incorporated in the Catholic Church ought to sense their privilege and for that very reason their greater obligation of bearing witness to the faith and to the Christian life as a service to their brothers and sisters and as a fitting response to God.¹

¹ Pope John Paul II. (1990) *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 11.

Gender Dysphoria and the Pastoral Imperative of Compassionate Concern

According to the American Psychiatric Association, gender dysphoria is “the psychological distress that results from an incongruence between one’s sex assigned at birth and one’s gender identity,”² which is construed as one’s psychological sense of gender. It is vitally important to engage individuals and situations involving gender dysphoria with personal sensitivity, compassion, patience, and pastoral solicitude. All forms of unjust discrimination and harsh treatment must be strongly avoided and corrected. It is similarly important to recognize the challenges parents and families face when a child or family member is experiencing gender dysphoria. This condition impacts the entire family.

In a culture that advances a highly subjective conception of love, many families of an adult or child with gender dysphoria will feel a sense of obligation to support their loved one by acceding to and advocating for an uncritical sense of “whatever is going to make them happy.” Family members may wrestle with a sense of confusion, misgivings, self-recrimination, and uncertainty over how best to support their loved one. They will likely face pressure—either directly or indirectly—from the prevailing culture to affirm and validate their loved one’s newly adopted gender and, in conjunction with medical personnel, to “resolve” the dysphoria by electing to pursue surgical and hormonal interventions aimed at altering the biological sex of the affected person. Such treatments, especially for children, are invasive and disruptive when aspects of the entire person are taken into consideration: biological, psychological, and spiritual. Additionally, from the perspective of reason and natural law, consistent with the tenets of Catholic Christian faith, these treatments do not promote the common good of society, particularly when it comes to the institutions of marriage and family, the complementarity of the sexes as established by God, the generation and nurturing of children, and overall human flourishing in relation to other persons in society.

For the parents of a child who presents with gender dysphoria, the overarching priority is to genuinely assist the child by acknowledging the suffering involved and to accompany him or her along the path to personal healing, self-acceptance, integration, and peace. Any response that merely ratifies and reinforces the perceived disconnect between biological sex and gender-affiliation is not genuine compassion. 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.”³

The Holy Father’s concerns are grounded in divine revelation and the Church’s teaching that our identities as male and female are established as part of God’s providential plan for humanity. The mystery of human sexuality as a key component of personal identity is received as a gift created by God that we are not authorized to seek to change. The Holy Father emphasizes the essential connection: “Biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated.”⁴ While there are obvious cultural and individual variations in how gender roles and personal qualities are expressed and accented, each person is called to a life of wholeness and integration, which in this context means an alignment between his or her gender identity and his or her sexual identity manifested at birth.

² Gender Dysphoria Diagnosis. (2022). Psychiatry.org. <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria>

³ Pope Francis. General Audience, April 15, 2015

⁴ Pope Francis. (2016). *Amoris Laetitia* (AL), no. 56.

Again, innate sexual 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: “each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way.”⁵

The human person is a body-soul union, and the body—as created male or female—is an essential aspect of the human person. There is a complex reality tied to the sex of a person involving the physical (i.e., in the gonads and other evident characteristics)⁶, psychological, and social constituents. A healthy person is one in whom these dimensions are integrated. The diagnosis of gender dysphoria does not merit the alteration of one’s body through drug-induced hormone therapies or surgery; rather, one is entitled to receive unconditional love and support, as well as psychological and pastoral care.

The Catholic Church teaches that the disruption of normal sexual development⁷, or more dramatically, the removal or destruction of healthy sexual and reproductive organs, is a type of “mutilation” that is medically and morally harmful. 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.”⁸

With this teaching in mind, gender dysphoria can be validly compared to the condition known as “body integrity identity disorder.” Both are conditions in which a person, stemming from a complex set of factors, holds a self-perception involving one’s physical status that is detached from objective reality. It would be contrary to an individual’s best interests for medical professionals, family members, other supporting figures such as teachers and mentors, as well as pastoral ministers to encourage and promote removal of healthy limbs. It is similarly contraindicated to encourage someone with gender dysphoria to undergo hormone treatment, or genital and other forms of mutilation.

The comprehensive Catholic Christian teaching about the human identity in accord with the mind and heart of Christ must be communicated and upheld with charity, practical wisdom and sensitivity. As the policies enumerated below state, members of our schools, parishes and other communities are to accompany those families and individuals experiencing gender dysphoria with compassion and courage and patiently support them in their life journey. At the same time, it must be understood that diocesan practices in our parishes and schools (including sacramental records and school records, bathroom and locker room use, participation on sports teams and other co-curricular activities) will refer to all persons by employing gender pronouns that correlate with their biological sex. Some families may disagree with these practices, and we acknowledge their freedom of conscience to withdraw or absent themselves from situations they find objectionable. Concomitantly, they must likewise respect the Church’s mission to witness to truths accessible to reason and faith if they are to fully participate in our faith communities, including our Catholic schools.

⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), no. 2333, 2335

⁶ Terminology. 2022. Psychiatry.org. https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/diversity/education/transgender-and-gender-nonconforming-patients/terminology#section_16

⁷ This policy does not address disorders of sexual development, meaning congenital conditions in which the development of chromosomal, gonadal, or anatomical sex is atypical.

⁸ CCC. No. 2333

General Summary of Catholic Christian Teaching Regarding the Human Person

1. The human person, created in the image and likeness of God, is a “unified creature composed of body and soul.” The soul is the spiritual principle of each human person and the “subject of human consciousness and freedom.”⁹ Yet man is truly himself only “when his body and soul are intimately united.”¹⁰ The human person is not a soul or a mind that has a body merely as a biological accessory. Rather, the human person is a body formed by a soul.¹¹ Human life and love are “always lived out in body and spirit,”¹² and thus the body is a “vital expression of our whole being.”¹³ So integral, in fact, is the body to who we are as human beings that the body and soul together are fashioned and “destined to live forever.”¹⁴ The creed expresses a belief in the “resurrection of the body,” or the belief that all persons will “rise again with their own bodies which they now bear.”¹⁵ The body which will one day rise is the very body which each person received as a gift and in which each person lives out his vocation to holiness.¹⁶
2. Our biological sex, expressed by our body, is a gift from God and is unchangeable. A person’s biological sex is expressed in and through the body. It cannot be changed because it is bestowed by God as a gift and as a calling, and “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.”¹⁷ Biological sex is a gift because in the very act of creation, God bestows upon each human person a biological sex—“Male and female he created them”¹⁸—two sexes that are different, equal, and complementary.¹⁹ It is a calling because we work out our salvation in the context of our masculinity or femininity.
3. A person’s ‘gender’ is inseparable from biological sex. The Catechism states that “Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul.”²⁰ Therefore, while biological sex and gender—or the socio-cultural manifestation of sex as well as “psychological identity”²¹—can be distinguished, they can never be separated.²² Should someone experience a tension between biological sex and gender, they should know that this interior conflict is not sinful

⁹ Glossary of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops—*Libreria Editrice Vaticana* English translation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Vatican: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 2000).

¹⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 5.

¹¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 76; St. John Paul II, General Audience of October 24, 1979; CCC, 365.

¹² Pope Francis, *Lumen fidei*, 34.

¹³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 5.

¹⁴ St. John Paul II, Message to Health Workers, Phoenix, Arizona, 1987.

¹⁵ Fourth Lateran Council (1215), DS, 801.

¹⁶ International Theological Commission, *Some 14 Current Questions in Eschatology* (1992), 1.2.5.

¹⁷ Romans 11:29

¹⁸ Genesis 1:27

¹⁹ CCC 355, 369

²⁰ CCC, 2332

²¹ DSM-5

²² Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio finalis* (24 October 2015), 58; Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, 56.

in itself²³ but rather reflects “the broader disharmony caused by original sin”²⁴ and can result from the residue of social ills and cultural distortions of what constitutes “masculinity” and “femininity.” Such persons should be treated with respect and charity, and “no one should suffer bullying, violence, insults, or unjust discrimination” based on such experiences. However, charity “needs to be understood, confirmed, and practiced in the light of truth,” and thus such persons should be encouraged to seek harmony between their biological sex and gender not through a rejection of one or the other, but through turning to Christ and medical and psychological services that are rooted in an authentic anthropology. Only in a graced embrace of one’s created nature as given by God can a person acknowledge and accept one’s sexual identity in every aspect— physical, moral, social, and spiritual. Through this graced receptivity to one’s own identity, a person abides in the freedom and peace available through Christ.

4. Respect for creation includes respect for one’s biological sex. As Pope Francis writes, “It is enough to recognize that our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. 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 that 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 if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek ‘to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it’.”²⁵

Policies

These policies are established as binding for diocesan parishes, schools, organizations, and institutions of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Des Moines.

As a general rule, in all interactions and policies, parishes, organizations, and institutions are to

²³ In Catholic moral theology, the term “disordered” has a particular meaning which may not be identical with how the term is used by psychologists and medical professionals. According to the Catholic moral tradition, every inclination, desire, and action is ordered to some particular purpose or end (i.e., consuming medicine is ordered toward health; sexual relations are ordered toward unity between spouses and procreation; etc.). Any inclination, desire, or action which impedes this purpose is considered “disordered” (i.e., the inclination to take medicine in order to commit suicide; or engaging in contraceptive sexual relations). Since the purpose of the body (as given by God) and the soul is to be united forever in the presence of God, an inclination which disrupts this unity—such as an experienced tension between natal sex and “gender”—would be considered “disordered.” Note well that it is the inclination, desire, or action that is disordered, not the inherent dignity of the person. On the relationship between the concept of “disorder” and the dignity of the person, see CCC, 2358 and the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona Humana*: Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics.

²⁴ Catholic Diocese of Arlington, “A Catechesis on the Human Person & Gender Ideology” (12 August 2021).

²⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato si*, 155.

recognize a person's biological sex. This policy applies, but is not limited to, all Church employees, personnel, volunteers, and those entrusted to the care of the Church. It is understood that occasional vendors and other parties may be on church-related premises who are not acting in an official capacity representing the Church; these policies do not obtain for them.

1. Designations and Pronouns. Any parochial, organizational, or institutional documentation which requires the designation of a person's sex is to reflect that person's biological sex. No person may designate a "preferred pronoun" in speech or in writing when related to ministry activities of any kind, nor are parishes, organizations, or institutions to permit such a designation. To permit the designation of a preferred pronoun, while intended as an act of charity, instead promotes the dissociation of biological sex and "gender" and thereby confuses or denies personal integrity.
2. Bathrooms and Locker Rooms. All persons must use the bathroom or locker room that matches their biological sex. Diocesan parishes, organizations, and institutions are permitted to have individual-use bathrooms that are available for all members of the respective community.
3. Attire. All persons are to ordinarily 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.
4. Athletics and Extra-Curriculars. Participation in parish, school, and co-curricular activities must be consistent with the biological sex of the participant. Some sports and activities may be open to participation by persons of both sexes.
5. Single-Sex Schools, Buildings, and other Programs and Institutions. Admission to single-sex programs, including but not limited to single-sex schools, camps, and retreats, is restricted to persons of the designated biological sex. Residences or other designated single-sex buildings are to be restricted to persons of the respective biological sex.
6. Medication. No person is permitted to have on-site or to distribute any medications for the purpose of gender reassignment. Also, students and those entrusted to the care of the Church are not permitted to take "puberty blockers," even if self-administered, on parish or school property, with the purpose of a potential or actual "gender reassignment."
7. Protecting the Vulnerable. Those entrusted to the care of the Church who express a tension between their biological sex and their "gender" and others directly affected by this tension (parents, guardians, etc.) should be guided to appropriate ministers and counselors who will assist the person in a manner that is in accord with the directives and teachings of the Church. Parishes, schools, and other Catholic institutions or organizations should be ever mindful, in accord with the policies of this document, to practice charity and to respect the personal dignity of individuals who may express tension or concerns about their biological sex.