



# A WORLD REBORN:

AN INSTRUCTION ON THE HUMAN PERSON AND PASTORAL ISSUES RELATING  
TO IDENTITY AND SEXUALITY

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE  
OF TULSA & EASTERN OKLAHOMA

2023



September 29, 2023

*Feast of Sts. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, Archangels*

Salvation history is the story of God’s love for every person He creates. God lovingly brings each person into existence through the cooperation of human parents. Thus, each of us is an intrinsically good creation of God, bearing His image and likeness, with intellect and will, and possessing an inherent dignity. It is for this reason that we must love one another even as God loves us. Salvation history is also the sobering account of human freedom, reminding us that each of us has the freedom to turn away from God through sin, as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden.

And most importantly, salvation history is the story of redeeming love. On the third day, Jesus Christ rose from the tomb and the good news of a world reborn rang out. Jesus is our Savior and reveals our truest identity when He calls us His sons and daughters. His love for us, no matter our life or circumstances, is the source of our joy and our dignity and provides the motive and direction of our life.

Though the world is redeemed, it is still wounded by sin, confusion, and the effects of sin. In the Garden of Eden, the devil asked Eve: “Did God really say you shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden?” With this question the tempter insinuated that God could not be trusted, as if His precepts were not given for our own good but were arbitrary limits on human choice. The world in which we live has many conflicting and confusing currents of thought that call into question what God has revealed to us about what it means to be a human person (created male or female), the truth about love, and the gift of human sexuality. As in the past, some of today’s cultural messages insinuate that God cannot be trusted, that His design for our bodies and His plan for human flourishing should yield to contrary human desires, empowered by technology. In the face of this confusion, these pastoral reflections and guidelines aim to help us grow closer to God by embracing our fundamental identity as sons and daughters of the Lord, cultivating the virtue of chastity, and pursuing holiness by “freely choosing what is good” (CCC 2339).

We must look to Jesus—who is our way, our truth, and our life—to understand the truth of our world and, in a special way, to understand the truth of the human person. Men and women bear a unique dignity within Creation, because only humanity is made in the image of God (Gen 1:27). To understand this image, we must again look to Christ who is the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). In saving us, Jesus gives us to one another as brothers and sisters. No one need walk alone. As we accompany one another, may the Holy Spirit guide us to that truth which will set us free. In this spirit of love and accompaniment, I offer these reflections and guiding principles to all of us who are searching for the truth about ourselves and on the journey to our truest home.

Promulgated this 29<sup>th</sup> day of September at the Chancery, 2023, as particular law of the Diocese of Tulsa, and entrusted to the Holy Family.<sup>1</sup>

*Most Rev. David Konderla*

The Most Rev. David A. Konderla  
Bishop of the Diocese of Tulsa

*Dcn. H. Garlick*  
Dcn. Harrison H. Garlick  
Chancellor

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<sup>1</sup> With gratitude to the Diocese of Marquette for use of some material from their “Created in the Image of God: An Instruction on Some Aspects of the Pastoral Care of Persons with Same-Sex Attraction and Gender Dysphoria.”

We will consider the following topics: (I) The Art of Pastoral Accompaniment, (II) Christian Anthropology and The Meaning and Purpose of Human Sexuality, (III) The Accompaniment of Persons who Experience Same-Sex Attraction and/or Identity-related Distress (IV) Pastoral Guidance for Select Circumstances and (V) Conclusion. There are then two appendices that address Church documents and pastoral resources.

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## **I. The Art of Pastoral Accompaniment**

Pope Francis continually calls for a Church that accompanies believers, first by establishing relationships of trust with one another, and then by walking together on the path of conversion, as a “pilgrimage with Christ to the Father” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 170).

In pastoral accompaniment, we meet each other where we are and walk together, step by step, “ever closer to Christ” (EG 170), in a manner consistent with the teaching Jesus has revealed to His Church. Accompaniment requires patience. The path of learning, integration, and conversion for ourselves and those we love may take many years. Consider St. Monica, who accompanied her son St. Augustine, praying for him for 17 years before he became a Christian. St. Ambrose also accompanied St. Augustine through preaching, teaching, and exhortation. St. Augustine eventually embraced baptism and the chaste life, and later was named a Doctor of the Church. His life and the lives of many saints remind us we cannot impose a timeline on conversion but must be patient with ourselves and others.

Sacred Scripture offers numerous examples from Jesus’ ministry to guide our pastoral care. For example, Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1–42) illustrates her journey towards faith and discipleship. Notice that Jesus does not begin His conversation with her by pronouncing a moral judgment on her behavior. Rather, He begins with the offer of living water and eternal life. Only after the woman begins to desire this water does the Lord point out the truth of her irregular situation: “You are right in the saying, ‘I do not have a husband.’ For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband.” As the woman’s journey toward faith continues, Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah. She, in turn, testifies to others, who also come to believe. Observe that conversion, faith, and discipleship arise from the encounter with Jesus.

Similarly, a personal encounter with Jesus is the catalyst for Zacchaeus’ conversion (Luke 19:1–10). Initially, Zacchaeus is curious about Jesus. When Jesus reaches out and expresses His desire to stay and spend time with Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus experiences a change of heart, responding: “Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I should give to the poor; and if I have extorted anything from anyone, I shall repay it four times over.” Observe that Zacchaeus’ desire to change his behavior arises *after* his personal encounter with Jesus.

From Scripture, then, we learn that the path of accompaniment leads first to a deeper encounter with Jesus, and a proclamation of the *kerygma*—Jesus Christ is Lord—the core message of the Gospel. The experience of God’s love and His grace strengthens us, so we can address sinful or unintegrated behavior, our own and that of others. As we explain the teaching of the Church, we must remember—and be confident—that it is good news to a wounded world. We all experience the pain that sin causes in our world: confusion, broken hearts, broken lives, and wounded families. The grace of God in Christ makes conversion possible over time. The Church’s teaching, because it comes from the Lord, fosters steadfast love, fidelity, unity, and fruitfulness. Embracing Jesus and His teaching is the way to conversion, integration, and healing. This is good news!

## **II. Christian Anthropology and the Meaning and Purpose of Human Sexuality**

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.”  
Genesis 1:27

What does it mean to be a human being? To be male or female? What is the meaning of the body? And the purpose of human sexuality? As our culture grows more secular and less religious, these questions become more urgent,

especially for younger generations.

The most fundamental truth about “who we are” is that we are loved and created by God, in His image and likeness. We have intrinsic dignity and value. We are both spiritual (having an immortal soul) and material (with either a male or female body). Put differently, the person is an integral unity of body and soul. What we do to the body we do to the person. If we experience a loving embrace, the person is embraced, not just the body. If, tragically, one experiences bodily violence, then the person is wounded, not just the body. As embodied persons, either male or female, our fundamental identity is as a son or daughter of God.

Looking more closely at what it means to be a human person, we understand ourselves within the harmony of God’s creation. As part of the goodness of God’s creation, the person is ordered towards God, who is the Good. Gifted with an intellect and will, each person has the capacity to make moral choices. We must seek the truth and choose what is truly good, so that we may enjoy eternal life with God, our heavenly Father. This moral law is inscribed in our nature. Pope Benedict XVI wrote: “Man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature and his will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself. In this way, and in no other, is true human freedom fulfilled.”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Pope Francis cautions us that “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.”<sup>3</sup> We accept our bodies “as God’s gift” just as we “accep[t] the entire world as a gift from the Father,” writes Pope Francis.<sup>4</sup> More specifically, the Church teaches that “everyone, man and woman is called to acknowledge and accept his [or her] sexual identity” as male or female (CCC 2333).

The meaning and purpose of human sexuality can be unveiled by asking a few questions about love. How do you want to be loved? Temporarily or permanently? Unfaithfully or faithfully? Unfruitfully or fruitfully, in a life-giving way? Partially or totally? Conditionally or unconditionally?

Deep down, we all want to be loved with a love that lasts forever. We want to be loved faithfully by someone who will never betray us. We want to be loved fruitfully in a way that gives us life. We want to be loved totally, with the other’s whole heart. We want to be loved unconditionally, despite our weaknesses, with an everlasting love.

This is how Jesus loves us. God is love, and He will never stop loving us. His love is faithful. He will never betray us. His love is total. He gave Himself completely for us when He died on the cross. His love is unconditional. He died for us, even though we are sinners. By God’s grace, we are called to love as God loves. Human sexuality has meaning and purpose: it is meant to express a love that is permanent, faithful, open to the gift of life, and unconditional, “for better, or for worse.”

The sacrament of matrimony is a permanent partnership of one man and one woman ordered to the procreation and education of children, and the good of the spouses (CCC 1601). Christian spouses are strengthened by the grace of this sacrament to love each other with the love of Jesus Christ. Only in the context of marriage—the union of one man and one woman—can sexual intercourse express a love that is permanent, faithful, open to life, and unconditional. Marriage is the answer to the question “why did God create both man and woman?”

The key to understanding our own sexuality is to understand that our bodies themselves have meaning. Indeed, in the Theology of the Body, Pope John Paul II taught that human embodiment as male or female bears witness to

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<sup>2</sup> [Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, Reichstag Building, Berlin, Thursday, 22 September 2011.](#)

<sup>3</sup> *Laudato Si*, 155.

<sup>4</sup> *Laudato Si*, 155.

the relational nature of the person and God’s vision for the family. The Church notes that “[p]hysical, moral, and spiritual difference and complementarity are oriented towards the good of marriage and the flourishing of family life” (CCC 2333). God’s vision for the human flourishing is the family, which images the Trinity. “The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit” (CCC 2205).

The person’s embodiment as male or female conveys the person’s capacity for motherhood or fatherhood, understood in both its physical and spiritual aspects. Our bodies, including our fertility, are integral to who we are, and only sexual relations between a man and a woman can conceive children. It is a tremendous privilege to cooperate with God in the creation of new persons who will live forever. “The eternal mystery of generation, which is in God himself, the one and Triune God (cf. *Eph* 3:14-15), is reflected in the woman’s motherhood and in the man’s fatherhood.”<sup>5</sup> Remembering, as Pope St. John Paul II wrote, that we “cannot fully find [ourselves] except through a sincere gift of self,” a man and woman cannot give themselves to each other totally in love unless this “gift of self” includes their fertility. Thus, only sexual intercourse that is open to life can express a total and fruitful love. Though children are not conceived in every act of intercourse, and a couple may experience infertility, their sexual relations are marital and in accord with God’s design for procreation.

### **III. The Accompaniment of Persons with Same-Sex Attraction and Identity-Related Distress**

Our fundamental approach to persons who experience same-sex attraction and identity or body-related distress is invitational. Through authentic friendship and pastoral accompaniment, we invite the person to a loving, personal encounter with Jesus Christ. All persons, including those who experience same-sex attraction or identity-related confusion or suffering, must be treated with dignity and respect. All unjust discrimination is to be avoided (CCC 2358).

As Christians, our fundamental identity as beloved children of God, created male or female, makes us heirs to the life of grace. The human person should never be defined by attractions or feelings. We are so much more. Thus, the practice of labeling oneself or others by terms such as “LGBT,” “gay,” or “transgender” should be avoided. Such labels are reductive and lead to confusion. The idea that proposing the Church’s moral teachings on sexuality, or encouraging authentic integration of sexual desires and identity-related feelings, is somehow *against* persons who experience same-sex attraction or identity-related distress is simply not true. We are not against people, for all people are children of God. We are *for* our brothers and sisters. Authentic pastoral care aligned with Catholic teaching seeks to assist all in discovering the peace and happiness of living according to our human nature and following God’s word.

#### **A. Same-Sex Attraction**

All persons, in every vocation, are called to a life of chastity. Chastity means “the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being” (CCC 2337). Chastity is an “apprenticeship in self-mastery,” an ordering of one’s sexuality according to reason and virtue (CCC 2339). We all experience disordered temptation to sin against chastity, but to be chaste leads to virtue and happiness. It is through our common call to chastity that we accompany one another, including our brothers and sisters who experience same-sex attraction, and they accompany us. We must listen to one another, try to understand experiences that are not our own and encourage one another, as we are all called to use our gift of sexuality according to its God-given nature.

The *inclination* towards same-sex sexual acts is not sinful and does not of itself make the individual culpable for sin (CCC 2358). All of us are inclined to sin, but sinful inclinations neither define us nor dictate our actions. Many people experience sinful inclinations of various kinds through no fault of their own. We sin only when we freely and deliberately *act* on desires that are not ordered according to God’s wisdom and our human nature—and thus

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<sup>5</sup> *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 18.

our true good and happiness. When the Church teaches that same-sex sexual acts are “intrinsically disordered,” she is not labeling individuals as “disordered,” but rather recognizing that same-sex sexual acts are not ordered to, or aligned with, God’s purpose for our sexuality. As such, they are always contrary to our human nature and to our ultimate good (CCC 2357). In the similar way, all promiscuity is intrinsically disordered and confuses us about God’s purpose for our sexuality. Under no circumstances can promiscuous acts be approved.

In sum, experiencing unwanted temptations against chastity is *not* sinful, but engaging in promiscuity of any kind *is* sinful. However, God does not leave us to face temptations alone. The virtue of chastity is a gift of the Spirit and a habit of heart worth cultivating. The company of others similarly committed to living chastely is encouraging and helps us discover the happiness of a chaste life. Members of the Courage Apostolate witness every day to the truth that all are called to holiness, and that persons who experience same-sex attraction can live chaste and fulfilling lives.<sup>6</sup>

## **B. Identity and Body-Related Distress**

The number of young people experiencing identity or body-related distress, or who have been diagnosed with “gender dysphoria” (clinical distress related to incongruence between a person’s self-perception and biological sex), has risen sharply in recent years. Our brothers and sisters experiencing such distress need, like all of us, to be accompanied with love. This accompaniment means taking the time to listen to another’s experience, especially if it is different than our own. Feelings of distress, anxiety, or alienation, whether in general or related to one’s given sexual identity, are painful and often confusing—a true cross. Every one of us is created by God as either male or female. The body tells us the truth about who we are. And while “gender” (the socio-cultural role associated with sex) and sex may be distinguished, they are not in fact separable.

Unfortunately, in our media culture today we can find a lot of confusing advice about sexual identity, including claims that “promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female” and assert that sexual identity “becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time.”<sup>7</sup> Though mostly rooted in a common desire to help people who are in distress, these cultural influences give rise to distorted beliefs that a person might be “born in the wrong body” or that one’s authentic identity might not match one’s God-given male or female sex.. They disregard the truth that “a crucial aspect of the order of nature created by God is the body-soul unity of each human person.”<sup>8</sup> Both the soul and the body “are constitutive of what it means to be human.”<sup>9</sup> Consequently, it is not true that a person’s soul can come into existence “on its own” or accidentally happen to be in a body, “as if it could just as well be in a different body. A soul can never be in another body, much less be in the wrong body.”<sup>10</sup>

Nor is it possible to erase or change one’s God-given sex. Sexual difference—the reality that the human person is created male or female—is “a reality deeply inscribed in man and woman... ‘Sexuality characterizes man and woman not only on the physical level, but also on the psychological and spiritual, making its mark on each of their expressions.’”<sup>11</sup> Tragically, in a search for answers to anxiety or distress they are experiencing, some young people become convinced that their God-given sex is “wrong” or can be changed, and they may pursue medical and surgical interventions to “alter the fundamental order of the human body.” Their hope is to “redesign” the body to match their self-perception.<sup>12</sup> These “technological interventions,” including puberty blockers to arrest natural

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<sup>6</sup> Courage International: A Roman Catholic apostolate for men and women who experience same-sex attractions and those who love them.

<sup>7</sup> Male and Female He Created Them, CCE 2019.

<sup>8</sup> USCCB Doctrinal Note, 3.20.23, par. 4.

<sup>9</sup> USCCB, par. 4.

<sup>10</sup> USCCB, par 4.

<sup>11</sup> USCCB, par. 5, quoting the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter on the Collaboration of Men and Woman in the Church and in the World (2004), no. 8.

<sup>12</sup> USCCB, par. 13.

sexual development or cross-sex hormones and surgeries that are “intended to transform the body so as to make it take on as much as possible the form of the opposite sex, [are] contrary to the natural form of the body,” and are “not morally justified.”<sup>13</sup>

We can see the wisdom of these teachings by considering the analogous experience of anorexia, an incongruence between the person’s self-perception (“I’m overweight”) and the person’s bodily reality (seriously underweight). The person suffering from anorexia often desires a result harmful to their health (e.g., to lose more weight) and may treat the body in ways that cause harm (e.g., restricted eating, purging). No matter how fixed the person’s self-perception, or how strong their belief that fulfilling their desires will make them happy, those who love the person must not reinforce the mistaken self-perception or facilitate the desired, but harmful, actions or result. We would never validate the belief that happiness lies in embracing the anorexia. Authentic love aligns with truth. A loving response seeks to help the person align his or her self-perception with reality. In the same way, as the Church in eastern Oklahoma, authentic love and accompaniment towards our brothers and sisters experiencing identity or body-related distress requires us to help the person integrate self-perceived identity and reality – the person’s sex as male or female.

#### **IV. Pastoral Guidance for Select Circumstances**

We are all prone to sin and times of confusion in our lives. We need God’s grace and wisdom. The parable of the prodigal son reminds us that no matter what confusion we may experience, even if we turn from God, He waits for us, hoping for our return. Jesus’ patient mercy and wisdom create a path home, leading to our peace and joy. The Church, entrusted with the merciful mission of Christ and authorized to teach in His name, proposes the truth of the Gospel while reflecting Jesus’ patient mercy, as we strive together to learn, accept, and live the truth.

The pastoral guidelines that follow help us to apply what Jesus reveals to us about ourselves and the gift of our sexuality. For all those in ministerial roles, these guidelines help us to understand how to accompany our brothers and sisters on the path to conversion. We all need accountability and fraternity in Jesus Christ. We are called to live our own vocations with integrity, committed to the truth of the person and the call to chastity, as we accompany those experiencing same-sex attraction or identity-related distress. Accompanying others can help us grow in humility and persevere in our own struggles and faults. We are one Body united in Jesus Christ, working together in love and patience for the good of all. Let us commit ourselves to a spirit of true accompaniment for the glory of our God and the salvation of souls in eastern Oklahoma.

##### **A. Ministerial Employees of the Church in Eastern Oklahoma**

Jesus said that His disciples must be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. So it is that ministerial employees at our parishes, schools, and other Catholic institutions are expected to live, in both word and deed, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because we are called to be faithful witnesses to the Gospel, we cannot exclude or live contrary to Catholic teachings—including teachings on chastity, same-sex attraction, and the human person—or we will sow confusion and cause harm. Our unity in Jesus Christ and His Church, as well as our ability to be His merciful face, is integral to the success of our ministries in eastern Oklahoma.

Therefore, the following guidelines aim to ensure unity in our approach and pastoral application of the Church’s teaching:

1. Those who work as ministerial employees of the Diocese must present themselves according to their God-given sex,<sup>14</sup> including their name, pronouns, and mode of dress;

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<sup>13</sup> USCCB, par. 14.

<sup>14</sup> “God given sex,” “sex,” and “biological sex” are all used herein to mean the biological classification encoded in our DNA by God, our Maker. Males have XY chromosomes and females have XX chromosomes. A person’s sex is determined at conception as either male or female. A person’s sex is not determined by their choice or will.

2. If married, employees must be in a union between one man and one woman; and
3. To avoid being a countersign to the Church and her teaching, all employees must avoid public displays, statements or social media communications that are contrary to the Church's teaching regarding chastity, human sexuality, and the nature of the human person.

## **B. Catholic Schools and Parochial Ministries**

It is important that our Catholic schools and our parochial ministries be united in their witness to Jesus Christ and their accompaniment of individuals. Therefore, the following guidelines aim to ensure unity in our approach and applications of the Church's teaching:

### **1) Parents and Legal Guardians Support**

Parents and legal guardians are the primary educators of their children (CCC 2223). Our Catholic schools and parishes must assume that parents coming to them desire their children to be formed in the truth of Jesus Christ as the Church understands it and teaches it. This is their right. Our Catholic schools and parishes partner with parents for this purpose, and so must ensure that parents are aware of these Guidelines and support the teaching of these truths to their children. Parents or legal guardians should respect these Guidelines, as a summary of Church teachings, in all activities of our Catholic schools and parishes. Catholic schools, respecting the role of parents as primary educators, commit to full transparency and full disclosure to parents on issues affecting the wellbeing of their children.

### **2) Students of Parents and Legal Guardians in Same-Sex Relationships**

Children of parents or guardians who are in a same-sex relationship are not to be denied admission to our Catholic schools or parochial or sacramental programs solely on that basis. The parents or legal guardians of such a child should be made aware of these Guidelines, and the school/parish must ensure that these parents or legal guardians understand that their child will be taught the truth of the human person, as summarized in these Guidelines, in an age-appropriate manner. To avoid scandal and confusion, schools/parishes should not present a same-sex relationship as equivalent to marriage. As the formation of the children under our care is primary to our concern, great care must be taken to ensure that other students are not led into error regarding the nature of marriage and parenthood. This guidance also applies to a parent or legal guardian who identifies as "transgender," "non-binary" or otherwise does not accept his or her God-given sex.

### **3) Students who Experience Same-Sex Attraction and/or Identity-related Distress**

Students experiencing same-sex attraction, identity, or body-related distress, or who have been diagnosed with "gender dysphoria," as discussed in these Guidelines, are to be treated with compassion and respect. All are children of God. All unjust discrimination is to be avoided (CCC 2358). Any bullying, harassment, or other signs of disrespect toward *any* students, for any reason, must not be tolerated. Students should be accompanied into a deeper understanding of the truth of the human person, with patience and charity. Students should respect Catholic teaching on these issues and refrain from any activity contrary to it.

Therefore, the following guidelines aim to ensure unity in our approach and applications of Catholic teaching:

- a. Catholic schools and parishes should actively encourage chastity amongst all students;
- b. All students will be addressed by their legal name and by pronouns that correspond with their God-given sex. Use of nicknames must be approved by parents, should correspond with the person's God-given sex, and not be intended to communicate the student's ambivalence of his or her sex.
- c. All bathrooms, locker rooms, and other similar areas should be distinguished as male or female only. Students, faculty, and visitors may use only bathrooms that correspond to the individual's God-given sex, with the exception of facilities for single-person occupancy open to either sex.



- d. Schools and parishes may designate single-occupancy bathrooms for use by families with small children or for use by either sex.
- e. Unless a sport is open to both men and women (co-ed), all sports should be designated as either male or female and participation restricted according to sex;
- f. All Catholic school uniforms, including for sports and other activities, should correspond to the student's God-given sex and express the virtues of chastity and modesty; and
- g. All Catholic school or parochial student groups should strive to live according to these Guidelines.

### **C. Sacraments of Initiation**

Children of parents or guardians who are in a same-sex relationship may be baptized, provided there is a well-founded hope that the child will be raised and educated in the Catholic faith (c. 868; cf. CDF, *Pastoralis actio*, 30), including the Church's teachings on marriage and family. The pastoral minister and the child's parents or legal guardians must work prudently to ensure that the baptism does not cause confusion or scandal regarding the Church's teaching on marriage and the family. In this situation it may be prudent to have a private celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism.

A baptized child under the care of a couple in a same-sex relationship or who has a Catholic parent in a same-sex relationship may be admitted to the sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist *if* the child is properly prepared and disposed, which should include catechesis on Holy Matrimony as consisting of the marriage of a man to a woman.

A person publicly living in a same-sex relationship (or any sexual relationship outside of an ecclesiastically recognized marriage between one man and one woman) is not yet ready to serve as a sponsor or Christian witness for the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. If the person desires to serve in this capacity, pastors should work with them to see if their relationship can be regularized or if they can enter into a chaste living arrangement.

Similarly, a person who publicly expresses a "transgender" identity or otherwise does not accept his or her God-given sex, or who has attempted a "gender transition" is not ready to serve as a sponsor or Christian witness for the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, absent repentance. Repentance does not necessarily require reversing physical changes to the body that the person may have undergone, but it does require no longer presenting as the opposite sex. Pastors should address such situations privately with the person and help them to understand the truth of human sexuality as the Church teaches it so that they might grow in this knowledge and love and accept the sex that God has created them to be. By itself the experience of identity or body-related distress, or the diagnosis of gender dysphoria is not sinful (assuming it does not arise from the person's free will) and would not preclude a person serving as a sponsor or a Christian witness, provided the person presents in accord with his or her God-given sex and understands and accepts the Church's teaching on the nature of the human person.

A person who is publicly living in a same-sex relationship (or in any sexual relationship outside of an ecclesiastically recognized marriage between one man and one woman) is not yet ready to be Baptized, Confirmed, or received into full communion with the Church, unless the person has repented and returned to living a chaste life. If the person is willing, pastors should accompany them to see if through further catechesis and formation their situation might be regularized. In danger of death, these rites always may be celebrated with one who asks for them.

Similarly, a person who publicly expresses a "transgender" identity or otherwise does not accept his or her given sex, or who has attempted a "gender transition" is not yet ready to be Baptized, Confirmed, or received into full communion with the Church, absent repentance. Repentance does not necessarily require reversing physical changes to the body that the person may have undergone, but it does require no longer presenting as the opposite

sex. Pastors should address such situations privately with the person and help them to understand the truth of human sexuality as the Church teaches it so that they might grow in this knowledge and love and accept the sex that God has created them to be. By itself, the experience of identity or body-related distress, or the diagnosis of gender dysphoria is not sinful (assuming it does not arise from the person's free will) and would not preclude a person seeking Christian Initiation, provided the person presents in accord with his or her God-given sex and understands and accepts the Church's teaching on the nature of the human person.

#### **D. Reception of Holy Communion and the Anointing of the Sick**

Persons who are living in a same-sex relationship (or in any sexual relationship outside of an ecclesiastically recognized marriage between one man and one woman) are not yet living in objective communion with the Church and so are not yet ready to receive Holy Communion. (c. 916). They should be invited to Mass where they may join in the prayer of the community. If the persons in the relationship are of the opposite sex, pastors should address such situations privately with them and help them to regularize their relationship, make a good confession and return to the sacraments. Such persons may be given Holy Communion in danger of death if they express repentance (c. 921). In such a case the benefit of the doubt should fall to administering the Sacrament.

By itself the experience of "gender dysphoria" or feelings of body or identity-related distress is not sinful if it does not arise from the person's free will and thus would not preclude reception of Communion. Persons who have begun the process of medically or surgically altering their bodies in such a way that they are explicitly and openly rejecting their God-given sex undertake a course of action that violates the teaching of the Church and jeopardizes their communion with the Church. Pastors should address such situations privately with the persons and help them to understand the truth of human sexuality as the Church teaches it so that they might accept the sex God has made them to be. While there may be subjective factors mitigating one's culpability, public and persistent rejection of one's sexed body, even after learning the teaching of the Church in this matter, indicates that one is not living in communion with the Church and so is not ready to receive Holy Communion (c. 916). Even so, all persons should be encouraged to continue to attend Mass and join in the prayer of the community.

The above also applies to the reception of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick (c. 1007). If there is danger of death and the person is unresponsive, evidence that he or she at least wished to die as a Catholic is sufficient to administer the sacrament. In a case of doubt, the sacrament is to be administered.

#### **E. Marriage**

Marriage is the permanent partnership of one man and one woman ordered to the procreation and education of children and the good of the spouses. Marriage comes to us from the hand of God and is not ours to define or redefine. God created marriage when He created both the man and the woman. Only the two of them, because of the complementary differences between them, are able to create the free, faithful and fruitful two-in-one flesh union that is marriage. Thus, when the Church teaches that persons of the same sex may not be married, and that what is today called "gender transitioning" cannot alter one's sex, this teaching is not a matter of withholding permission but of recognizing the nature of marriage, of man and woman and their relationship with God their Creator. This is why Catholic ministers may not bless or otherwise solemnize a same-sex relationship and Church facilities may not be used to bless or otherwise solemnize a same-sex relationship.

Moreover, if a person has taken steps to alter the body for purposes of "gender transition," or publicly expresses an identity incongruent with his or her God-given sex, it indicates that the individual has not yet integrated the truth of his or her sexuality in a way that would permit him or her to enter into marriage with a person of the opposite sex. Couples in this situation are encouraged to deepen their understanding of the teaching of the Church on the nature of the human person, and the truth and meaning of human sexuality so that each might accept the truth of his or her own sex.

## **F. Liturgical Ministries and Leadership Roles**

A person who is publicly living in a same-sex relationship (or in any sexual relationship outside of an ecclesiastically recognized marriage between one man and one woman) is not yet ready to exercise a liturgical ministry or position of leadership including, but not limited to, lector, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, catechist, member of the finance or pastoral council, etc., unless the person has repented and returned to living in chastity. This is simply because part of the duty of all leadership in the Church is to avoid scandal or confusion regarding the teaching of the Church. If persons in this situation are willing, pastors should accompany them to see if through further catechesis and formation their situation could be regularized.

Similarly, a person who publicly does not accept his or her God-given sex or identifies as “transgender” or has attempted a “gender transition” is not yet ready to exercise a liturgical ministry or position of leadership including but not limited to lector, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, catechist, member of the finance or pastoral council, etc., unless the person has repented. Pastors should address such situations privately with the person and help the person to understand the truth of the human person as the Church teaches it so that the person may grow in this knowledge and accept the sex that God has created the person to be. Repentance does not necessarily require reversing any surgical changes to the body that the person may have undergone, but it does require no longer presenting as anything other than their God-given sex.

The experience of identity or body-related distress or incongruence in one’s sexual identity is not sinful if it does not arise from the person’s free will, nor would it stand in the way of exercising a liturgical ministry or position of leadership, provided the person presents in accord with his or her God-given sex and understands and accepts the Church’s teaching on the nature of the human person.

## **G. Sacramental Records**

Sacramental records must reflect the God-given sex of the individual and that of the individual’s parents. Contact the Bishop’s office for further questions. All sacramental records should be kept in accordance with diocesan *Guidelines for Sacramental Records & Reports for Parish Personnel*.

## **H. Pastoral Support & Application**

It is paramount to the success of our ministries that all our ministerial employees receive the active support of the clergy, especially pastors. Pastors are called to lead their parishes and schools in adherence to these Guidelines according to the pastoral prudence and accompaniment discussed. It is necessary to strive after invitation, mercy, and accompaniment while avoiding scandal or confusion related to the Church’s teaching. As Pope Francis reminds us, gender ideology presents real dangers to individuals, children, and families. Ministerial employees should feel strongly supported in upholding these Guidelines and may themselves need advice in how best to do so. Pastors should lead by example in both word and deed. All clergy, both priests and deacons, are bound to be faithful witnesses to the Gospel, which includes the teachings of the Church on sexuality, mercy, hope, and on same-sex attraction and identity-related distress or “gender dysphoria.”

Catholic entities outside the diocesan Catholic schools, parishes, and Chancery are encouraged to adopt these Guidelines into a similar document for their ministry.

## **V. Conclusion**

God’s mercy is without end, and we can never outdo Him in generosity. Whatever difficult circumstances we may face in this life, Jesus invites us into perfect union with Him. May our efforts to respond to His invitation lead us to insight, joy, and peace.

## **Appendix 1: Church Documents**

Congregation for Catholic Education. “[‘Male and Female He Created Them’ Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory In Education](#),” February 2, 2019.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. “[Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons](#),” October 1, 1986.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *[Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care](#)*, 2006.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. “[Considerations Regarding Proposal to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons](#),” March 28, 2003.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. “[Some Considerations Concerning the Response to Legislative Proposals On the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons](#),” July 23, 1992.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. “[Responsum of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to a \*dubium\* regarding the blessing of the unions of persons of the same sex](#),” February 22, 2021.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. “[Doctrinal Notes on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body](#)”, 2023.

## **Appendix 2: Pastoral Resources**

Below you will find select resources to assist you in the art of pastoral accompaniment:

Marriage Unique for a Reason: <https://marriageuniqueforareason.org>

Courage International: <https://couragerc.org/>

Person and Identity: <https://personandidentity.com>

Theology of the Body Evangelization Team: <http://tobet.org>. In particular, I recommend to parents, teachers and catechists their series titled *The Body Matters*.

The Marriage Reality Movement: <https://marriagerealitymovement.org/>

*Beyond Gay* by David Morrison

*Why I Don't Call Myself Gay* by Daniel Mattson

Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological and Social Sciences  
*The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society* Lawrence Mayer, M.B., M.S., Ph.D. and Paul R. McHugh, M.D. Number 50 – Fall 2016 <https://www.thenewatlantis.com/issues/no-50-fall-2016>

*Religious Freedom after the Sexual Revolution: A Catholic Guide* by Helen M. Alvaré

*Male, Female, Other? A Catholic Guide to Understanding Gender* by Jason Evert