



THE PERSON AND IDENTITY PROJECT

# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FOR SCHOOLS ON GENDER IDEOLOGY

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The information in this document is provided as general information and does not constitute professional legal, medical, or counseling advice. Readers needing individual guidance in relation to their specific circumstances should seek personal advice from qualified legal, medical, or counseling professionals.

## 1. Why is gender ideology such a concern for schools and families?

It is hard to overstate the extent to which youth culture, particularly the digital world, is saturated with gender ideology, often packaged as LGBTQ messaging and images. As a result, most students in Catholic schools—even very young students—are likely to be aware of the language of gender ideology (See The Basics, “Terminology”). Many also will be familiar with celebrities who have “come out,” popular Netflix series featuring transgender or non-binary characters, and activist slogans that permeate digital advertising (“Be who you are” or “Love is love”). In addition, intersectional campaigns for “Black Lives Matter,” “Anti-Racism,” and other social movements link their causes to “trans rights” and LGBTQ slogans. Children who are active on social media or consume significant video content, including YouTube, will have the greatest exposure to transgender content. Transgender narratives, causes, and images are embedded in comedy videos, Instagram posts and Tik Tok videos. Through their phones, teens have 24/7 access to literally thousands of video blogs (“vlogs”) or YouTube channels documenting the personal journeys of 14, 15, and 16-year old “trans” or “non-binary” adolescents who are undergoing gender “transitioning” using hormones or surgery. Many of these videos are raw, emotionally manipulative, and distort the medical facts. The teen digital world sugar-coats the serious mental health issues, long-term health consequences, and poor outcomes that result. Every story ends well—life gets so much better after transition. (Search algorithms never seem to promote the many videos of de-transitioners—those who regret their actions and are trying to warn others.

Catholic school communities also can expect to have a continual influx of students and staff from other educational environments, where “inclusive” terminology and pronouns may have been the norm, where institutional policies assumed everyone has a “gender identity,” and where students and staff were expected to affirm every identity as valid. As a result, controversial language and beliefs can be introduced unwittingly into the Catholic school environment.

As the number of adolescents identifying as trans or non-binary continues to rise, Catholic young people will be increasingly likely to have friends (both in or outside of the school community) who assert a transgender identity or become outspoken “allies” of the cause. Sympathy, compassion, and friendship may make it difficult for adolescents to sift facts from falsehoods, especially if they fear hurting a friend or being tagged as mean or bigoted for not affirming the friend’s “transgender” identity.

As a result of this cultural saturation, students and their families might have uncritically incorporated the language and definitions of gender ideology or absorbed erroneous beliefs that a person could “change” sex or “transition” towards an identity at odds with biological sex. Some may believe that such identity issues are simply a matter of choice and that tolerance, or even Christian charity, requires them to “accept” and affirm all identities. In addition, some students may have family members who identify as members of the “LGBTQ” community or assert an identity at odds with biological sex.



## **2. In light of gender ideology, what “big picture” goals should school leaders keep in mind?**

Be intentional about presenting a clear vision of the person, rooted in Christian anthropology. (Do not assume students will absorb this informally.)

Be confident in the truth: Christian anthropology offers a vision of the person that is illuminated by faith, resonates with experience, and is rooted in science. It lays a foundation for human flourishing.

Explain clearly to parents (and older students) what gender ideology is, how it differs from Christian anthropology, and why the Church regards gender ideology as harmful not only to the individual but also to the culture at large. (See “What is gender ideology”)

Implement policies consistent with the Christian view of the person. Schools should not validate the premises of gender ideology, even indirectly, by silence or inaction.

In age-appropriate ways and in partnership with parents, schools should proactively counter gender ideology through periodic lessons, presentations, etc., as well as through unscripted conversations and teachable moments.

## **3. What is the connection between Christian anthropology and the mission of a Catholic school?**

**According to Vatican II’s Declaration on Christian Education (1965)**, “a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies... in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share.” Thus, the mission of a Catholic school is not principally to impart information, but to form students in light of their ultimate destiny—eternal life with God. Authentic Christian education helps young people become “ever more aware of the gift of Faith they have received” and to “be conformed in their personal lives” to the person of Christ. The mature person needs to know Christ in order to know himself or herself. In 2019, the Congregation for Catholic Education highlighted the importance of education in Christian anthropology, observing that “if we are to provide well-structured educational programmes that are coherent with the true nature of human persons (with a view to guiding them towards a full actualisation of their sexual identity within the context of the vocation of self-giving), it is not possible to achieve this without a clear and convincing anthropology that gives a meaningful foundation to sexuality and affectivity.”<sup>1</sup>

Forming students in the Christian vision of the human person is at the heart of Catholic education. Every teacher and administrator must be fully equipped and committed to this task, no matter what subjects they teach. Christian educators help shape their students’ understanding of human dignity, human nature, freedom, sin, virtue, and vocation—and how they all fit together. Indeed, forming students in Christian anthropology goes beyond concepts to the real world of moral decision-making. The post-Christian culture rejects objective truth and largely scorns Christian morality and faith; it bombards adolescents with false messages about who they are and how to be happy. Schools that are intentional about giving formation in Christian anthropology, proactive

about providing students with answers to their unspoken questions and dedicated to helping their students develop a mature relationship with Christ will give them a priceless gift.

#### *References*

1. “Male and Female He Created Them: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education” Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education (2019), 33.

#### **4. Practically speaking, what aspects of school life provide an opportunity to present an integrated vision of the human person, or to counter gender ideology?**

Catholic schools can integrate Christian anthropology in numerous ways:

**Mission and identity:** The mission and identity statements of a Catholic school should express the school’s grounding in the Christian vision of the human person (Christian anthropology) and its fidelity to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

**Environment:** Taking into account the Christian vision of the person, the Catholic school should aim to create and foster an environment that will form children in an authentic, integrated understanding of themselves, the virtues and the teachings of Christ. Artwork, music, celebrations, themes, language, and other aspects of school culture should reinforce, not undermine, Christian anthropology.

**Policies:** School policies should state that they are intended to conform to Catholic teaching in all respects. They should align with and reinforce Christian anthropology, including the reality and meaning of sexual difference (Contact the Person and Identity Project for specific policy guidance.)

**Faculty/staff training:** While it is vital to have policies on the books that conform with Christian anthropology, it is also important to have well-formed faculty and staff to implement these policies. Formation of students often occurs one-to-one, which means that faculty, coaches, and counselors play a tremendously important role in students’ formation. All faculty and staff, particularly new hires from public schools or recent graduates of secular schools of education, should be given specific education in Christian anthropology, preferably before they begin teaching or soon thereafter. They also should be invited to raise questions and clarify any misperceptions about Catholic teachings related to gender ideology, in an atmosphere that presumes good will on the part of all. Faculty and staff who previously worked in public schools – traditional or charter – should receive specific instructions on how Catholic school policies differ from public school policies on issues related to human sexuality and gender ideology, as well as the role of parents as primary educators of their children.

**Parental education:** The Church recognizes parents as the primary educators of their children. School can offer presentations and resources to help parents understand Christian anthropology and the challenges of gender ideology, and to equip them to answer their children’s questions. This is particularly important because many parents feel unprepared to answer their children’s questions in light of the rapid rise of transgender ideology. If possible, schools should ensure that programs to educate parents on Christian anthropology and gender ideology are offered in Spanish as well. (The Person and Identity Project is developing Spanish language materials and has a pastoral expert fluent in Spanish.)

Integrated curriculum: Although Christian anthropology can be taught in summary fashion it is far better for students to absorb the Christian vision of the person in a more integrated fashion, throughout the child's education, in recurring and age-appropriate ways. Several curriculum providers incorporate the theology of the body in age appropriate ways. (See Resources.)

Textbooks, classroom, and administrative materials. Schools need to thoroughly screen secular textbooks, library materials and digital resources to avoid inadvertent promotion of a false anthropology. Teachers should be instructed not to supplement the curriculum with digital or secular resources without prior approval. This is critical in light of fast-moving developments on the K-12 curriculum front. Several key states (including Illinois and California) now require LGBTQ history to be taught in various grades. Many publishers have changed all or most of their texts to comply, while others have moved towards integrating "inclusive" LGBTQ images, stories, and examples across the curriculum. (NOTE: The Catholic Textbook project offers history and science texts and materials, grades 4-9, compatible with the Catholic worldview.) In addition, library associations and booksellers increasingly incorporate LGBTQ storylines in their recommended lists. For example, books recommended for kindergarteners might include stories about "gender transitions." We suggest administrators allow adequate time each year to screen materials or to find alternatives as needed.

Proactive instruction for students. In light of the cultural challenges, it is important for schools to discuss the prevailing cultural narratives and misinformation with students, in age-appropriate ways. Students in Catholic schools are immersed in the same youth culture as their peers. They need to hear their teachers and Catholic leaders present Christian anthropology in direct contrast to the cultural lies, and then debunk the lies. If Catholic adults are silent on these topics, adolescents will hear only the culture's erroneous messages, not the truth.

## **5. What is the goal of a Catholic school's policies?**

The goal of policies established in a Catholic school should be to create and foster an environment in which children can grow in virtue and be formed according to the teachings of Christ, in accord with the school's Catholic mission. Therefore, school policies should reinforce Christian anthropology, including the reality of sexual difference and its relevance in certain spheres. Christian anthropology is unalterably opposed to many aspects of the gender ideology currently affecting the culture nationally and internationally. School (and diocesan) policies should explicitly state that they are written to conform to the teaching of the Catholic Church in all respects. Policies that are unequivocally rooted in Catholic teaching provide the best foundation for religious freedom claims or defenses against lawsuits or demands by parents, employees, activists, or government entities that seek to compel actions or responses incompatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church and the mission of Catholic institutions. All staff (particularly new hires from public schools or trained in secular schools of education) should understand that the policies of a Catholic school necessarily differ, in substantial ways, from the policies of public or private secular schools.

## 6. What principles should guide Catholic schools as they address sensitive topics and concerns related to gender ideology?

**Compassion, love, and truth are inseparable.** Genuine understanding and compassion require love for all persons—for their true good, for their authentic freedom in light of the truth. **The Church’s teachings on morality and the human person are compassionate *precisely* because they are *true*.**

“As Teacher, [the Church] never tires of proclaiming the moral norm... The Church is in no way the author or the arbiter of this norm. In obedience to the truth which is Christ, whose image is reflected in the nature and dignity of the human person, the Church interprets the moral norm and proposes it to all people of good will, without concealing its demands of radicalness and perfection” (*Veritatis Splendor*, 95-96).

“In fact, genuine understanding and compassion must mean love for the person, for his true good, for his authentic freedom. And this does not result, certainly, from concealing or weakening moral truth, but rather from proposing it in its most profound meaning as an outpouring of God’s eternal Wisdom, which we have received in Christ, and as a service to man, to the growth of his freedom and to the attainment of his happiness. ...Because there can be no freedom apart from or in opposition to the truth, the categorical — unyielding and uncompromising — defense of the absolutely essential demands of man’s personal dignity must be considered the way and the condition for the very existence of freedom” (*Veritatis Splendor*, 95-96).

### ***Integrate concrete circumstances with the moral law.***

In Catholic schools, questions related to gender ideology often arise in relation to the concrete circumstances of a particular person or family. At the same time, however, these situations raise pastoral concerns important to the entire school community. For example, if the mom of a third grade girl (female) asks the administration, teachers, and classmates to call her daughter by male pronouns and a new name to signify her “boy” identity, this has implications for others as well— her peers, teachers, and others will be asked to validate her (false) identity as a “boy.” These situations need to be addressed with pastoral care rooted in love and concern for the person. Pastoral care recognizes God’s call to every baptized person to share in eternal life and to follow the moral law as the way to happiness. “A person’s discomfort with his or her sex, or the desire to be identified as the other sex, is a complicated reality that needs to be addressed with sensitivity and truth. Each person deserves to be heard and treated with respect; it is our responsibility to respond to their concerns with compassion, mercy and honesty” (USCCB, 2017).

Pastoral care, then, works towards the integration of one’s concrete circumstances with objective truth. It is important to understand that a choice cannot be a “good” choice for the person unless it is consistent with God’s law (the moral law). “Acting is morally good when the choices of freedom are in conformity with man’s true good and thus express the voluntary ordering of the person towards his ultimate end: God himself, the supreme good

in whom man finds his full and perfect happiness” (Veritatis Splendor, no. 72). “Conscience thus formulates moral obligation in the light of the natural law: it is the obligation to do what the individual, through the workings of his conscience, knows to be a good he is called to do here and now” (Veritatis Splendor, no. 59).

Care for individuals, in light of the moral law, also needs to take into account how the proposed actions will influence others’ conscience formation, the institution’s identity and mission and fidelity to Catholic teachings, the potential for scandal, and legal and other practical considerations.

### ***Distinguish Christian anthropology from gender ideology.***

Christian anthropology and gender ideology are incompatible. Christian anthropology refers to the understanding of the person grounded in the Creation accounts in Genesis and supported by reason and developed in the writings of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, among others. Gender ideology claims that human identity is the choice of the individual. (See “What is the human person?” for a description of Christian anthropology and how it differs from gender ideology.) As gender ideology gains traction culturally, it is ever more important to understand how gender ideology differs from Christian anthropology, and how schools can help Catholics withstand the cultural current that undermines truth and threatens religious freedom and harms the most vulnerable.

## **7. Why does the Church refer to sexual identity instead of gender identity?**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that everyone must accept his or her sexual identity as male or female (CCC 2333). This choice of words is not accidental. The Church teaches that the person is an integrated unity of body and soul, created either male or female; the term sexual identity conveys this unity. This truth about the person is known to us not only through God’s word (“male and female He created them,” Gen. 1:27) but also through the witness of science and medicine, which affirms that human beings are only either male or female. (See “What is Sex?”)

The Church affirms the equal dignity of males and females, as both are created by God in his image and likeness, and uses the term sexual difference to convey the idea that male and female are distinct ways of being human. Complementarity expresses the insight that sexual difference between males and females enables a particularly enriching and fruitful kind of collaboration and mutual support, especially as it is expressed in marriage and family life (CCC 2333). In sum, sexual identity conveys an objective truth about who we are (male or female) and its significance.

In contrast, gender identity is a subjective feeling or self-perception that is disconnected from the reality of a person’s sex. Like other feelings, it may be fluid or change. It cannot be measured, proven, or accurately observed by others. First popularized in the early 1960s, gender identity was intended to express a person’s self-perceived conformity to sex stereotypes. The meaning of gender identity expanded to include the idea that person’s identity is self-defined, regardless of bodily



reality and biological sex. Children and adolescents are often encouraged (on social media, in peer groups, or in public schools) to explore or determine a gender identity through the distorted lens of stereotypes, comparing themselves to rigid notions of masculinity and femininity to decide where they fall on the “gender spectrum.” This is a harmful approach. It promotes a false understanding of identity as dependent on subjective feelings or social conformity instead of the unchangeable truth of being male or female. A highly politicized term, “gender identity” is increasingly asserted as a “human right” that “may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means” (Yogyakarta Principles 2006). Catholics should avoid using the term “gender identity” because its meaning and associated political claims are incompatible with the truth of the human person as taught by the Catholic Church. From a practical standpoint, it also encourages a hyper-focus on rigid stereotypes. Catholic should encourage every child to embrace his or her identity as male or female, with the freedom to pursue personal interests and develop individual personalities. (See FAQ on individual personality traits.)

## **8. How do I explain sexual identity and gender identity to students?**

Begin with observable biological reality: human beings are either male or female from the moment of conception. Sex is acknowledged (not assigned) at birth and often before birth, thanks to sonograms. A person’s sex is immutable, as each cell in a person’s body has a sex—male or female. Taking hormones of the opposite sex or undergoing genital surgery to change the body’s appearance has no effect on the person’s sex. (See FAQ “What is sex?”) The person seeking to understand “who I am” must begin with the fact that he or she is created male or female. God creates each of us as a unity of body and soul, either male or female; being male or female is a person’s sexual identity. Our identity is a gift from God. This is why, as the Catechism teaches, each person must accept his or her sexual identity (CCC 2333). “Gender identity,” on the other hand, describes a feeling or self-perception, unrelated to bodily sex, that can change over time. It is not a stable basis for a person’s identity.

## **9. What if the compassionate response to identity issues seems to conflict with the teaching of the Church?**

**Truth and charity are inseparable in pastoral care.** Discussions of pastoral care begin by recognizing the authority of the bishop, as primary teacher and successor to the Apostles. The diocesan bishop, perhaps in conjunction with the diocesan Catholic schools’ office, should take the lead in crafting any diocesan-wide plans, or approving parish or school-designed plans, to address issues related to sexual identity that might affect Catholic schools, parishes, or the diocese as a whole. Administrators, teachers, and parents alike need to understand the responsibility the bishop has been entrusted with by the Church in these situations.

Second, Catholics need to have the confidence of faith that authentic compassion always aligns with the truth. It is never loving or compassionate to affirm or facilitate the immoral or harmful actions of another person. Catholic teachings lead to healing not harm. The Catholic Church’s pastoral care “can never in fact be separated from her teaching mission, which she must always carry out as the faithful Bride of Christ, who is the Truth in person,” wrote Pope St. John Paul II in the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. He continued:

*In obedience to the truth which is Christ, whose image is reflected in the nature and dignity of the human person, the Church interprets the moral norm and proposes it to all people of good will, without concealing its demands of radicalness and perfection. In fact, genuine understanding and compassion must mean love for the person, for his true good, for his authentic freedom. And this does not result, certainly, from concealing or weakening moral truth, but rather from proposing it in its most profound meaning as an outpouring of God's eternal Wisdom, which we have received in Christ, and as a service to man, to the growth of his freedom and to the attainment of his happiness.<sup>1</sup>*

Third, reason and science provide additional support for Catholic teaching on these issues. In its guidance document on gender ideology, the Congregation for Catholic Education stressed the importance of “formation for formators,” the need to educate Catholic teachers, administrators and clergy about the scientific facts, psychological aspects, and medical concerns related to the expression of “transgender” identities and the concept of “gender transition.”<sup>2</sup> Catholic educators who know the facts about the immutable nature of sex, the medical harms of “transitioning” children or adolescents, and alternative avenues for providing support will have the confidence that the truly compassionate course of action aligns with Catholic teaching. “Gender affirmation” is neither supportive nor compassionate (See “The Basics” and Medical or Psychological Resources).

As Christ's example makes clear, love neither abandons the other nor accompanies the person down a self-destructive path. Instead, our task is to speak the truth in love, helping the person to integrate his or her concrete circumstances with objective truth.

#### References

1. Pope St. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 95 (1993).
2. In its guidance document “Male and Female He Created Them” (2019), the Congregation for Catholic Education stressed the need for “formation of formators” (teachers, educators), for the benefit of the entire educational community. “Catholic educators need to be sufficiently prepared regarding the intricacies of the various questions that gender theory brings up and be fully informed about both current and proposed legislation in their respective jurisdictions, aided by persons who are qualified in this area, in a way that is balanced and dialogue-orientated.” “Male and Female He Created Them: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education” Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education, (2019) 49.

## 10. Should administrators be concerned about secular curricula or materials?

Administrators need to be particularly vigilant when using any resources—from textbooks to administrative forms to digital supplements—that are created for public or non-Catholic schools.

Textbooks, classroom, and digital resources: Several key states (including Illinois and California) now require LGBTQ history to be taught in various grades. Many publishers have changed their texts to comply, while others have already moved towards greater “inclusivity” of LGBTQ images, stories, and examples across the curriculum. In addition, library associations and booksellers increasingly incorporate LGBTQ storylines in their recommended lists. For example, books for kindergarteners might include stories about “gender transitions.” Schools need to thoroughly screen secular textbooks, library materials, and digital resources to avoid inadvertent promotion of a false anthropology. Advocacy groups have become significant suppliers of supplementary digital

lessons and educational materials (often organized around special themes, identity categories, and progressive causes) which they market directly to teachers. Teachers in a Catholic school should be instructed not to supplement the curriculum with digital or secular resources without prior approval.

Public-school-provided resources or administrative paperwork: If your school uses a nurse from the public school district or is required to submit forms to the state or public school district, check the language on the forms. Some forms now include non-binary or gender non-conforming options in place of the student's biological sex. Others ask for "gender identity" of the student in addition to sex. These options should not be used and should be removed from the forms. Videos, presentations or materials given to students by guidance counselors, intermediate unit instructors or health care providers must be reviewed before being given to students or parents, to ensure that they do not undermine Christian anthropology. Do not assume that the counselor or school nurse will understand the mission and identity of a Catholic school or that he or she will take the initiative to screen out objectionable resources. (For example, routine health information about vaccines or student health increasingly depict LGBTQ couples or symbols.) It is the administrator's responsibility to ensure the school's fidelity to the mission.

### **11. Is it appropriate for a school to address topics related to sexual identity, "LGBTQ" advocacy, or persons who identify as transgender or nonbinary? If so, when?**

Parents are the primary educators of their children, particularly on such sensitive topics as sexuality and reproduction. The Church and Catholic schools, however, play an important role in supporting the parents' instruction and integrating these concepts, where appropriate, into discussions of Christian anthropology, faith, and morality. Children naturally realize their own sexual identity long before they begin school. Parents teach children about their bodies, proper hygiene, and the physical differences between males and females. Children also quickly understand differences between boys and girls, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers. As children mature, parents should explain the link between a child's developing body and reproduction (and discuss modesty and chastity), reinforcing the child's sexual identity and the purpose of sexual difference.

The culture increasingly portrays a false narrative about human identity, so it is critically important that Catholic schools be intentional about forming children in an understanding of who they are, in the light of Christ. The basics of Christian anthropology—the vision of the human person—can be introduced naturally, well before specific discussions of sexuality. In fact, Christian anthropology lays a strong and necessary foundation for those later discussions. Discussions of *sexual identity*—the reality of being male or female—are different from discussions about sex and reproduction. Schools should emphasize the equal dignity of males and females, while acknowledging differences. Distinguish the truth about sexual difference from the notion of stereotypes, however, as stereotypes tend to inhibit self-understanding and limit individual potential (See FAQ on personality traits and interests).

Because gender ideology has saturated the culture, particularly entertainment, social media, and public education, children often become familiar with—or formed in—the basic tenets of gender ideology in kindergarten and elementary school. Parishes and schools need to be proactive in deciding how to address these topics, particularly in determining how to help students reject the false narratives peddled by the culture. Parents should be involved in these conversations and plans for classroom instruction on these topics should recognize parents’ authority and responsibility for their own children.

The chastity formation programs in use by a school or diocese might provide an initial opportunity to address gender ideology. Most programs already include a parent component, which often utilizes in-person meetings to explain the curriculum. These meetings might provide an excellent opportunity to explain Christian anthropology, in the context of human and moral formation, and to educate parents about the specific challenges of gender ideology. Parents need resources on gender ideology (see our Parent Toolkit) as well as resources that explain the theology of the body.

Classroom teachers need to be prepared to answer questions related to LGBTQ issues and sexual identity in particular, in age-appropriate and sensitive ways. For example, if a child mentions that a girl in her neighborhood “became” a boy, then the teacher might respond that girls are girls forever and cannot “become” boys. A simple and straightforward response will likely suffice, and it respects the natural development and innocence of the child. Teachers should follow up on questions like these with the student’s parents, so they are aware of the child’s questions and can reinforce the truth.

Middle school and high school science classes provide opportunities to present the truth about human biology and the unchangeable nature of sex, quite apart from any discussion of gender ideology. In addition, middle school and high school teachers can address sexual identity in the context of comprehensive teaching about the human person and human sexuality, in religion classes on theology of the body or sexual morality, discussions of current events, or even in special presentations to older high school students.

The uncritical acceptance of gender ideology inevitably affects students’ faith lives, by creating unresolved contradictions between the tenets of faith and ideological narrative. Topical discussions about catechetical concepts, such as Creation, Redemption, the human person, and the sacraments, may surface questions about gender ideology and provide unscripted opportunities to present Christian anthropology. Similarly, Catholic middle and high school teachers should anticipate that questions about identity and sexuality and Church teachings may arise unexpectedly or that students may reveal difficult family issues during conversations with peers or staff. Schools need to ensure the staff is well-prepared to recognize and utilize opportunities to address these issues with children and teens, always with sensitivity and deference to the parents’ authority as primary educators. Teachers who feel unsure of how to respond to sensitive questions need to bring them to the principal or administrator’s attention. If a teacher becomes aware that a child has identity issues or is taking steps to “transition,” the teacher must bring the situation to the attention of the principal, administrator, or pastor, who can then engage the parents and seek guidance from the diocese about how to proceed.



## 12. What are some examples of situations that Catholic schools might encounter?

Schools can expect to encounter any of the following scenarios:

Student or staff incorporate transgender terminology into their classroom conversations or take advocacy stands in the classroom that support or validate tenets of gender ideology or a particular person's "gender identity."

A student shares, in casual conversation with classmates, that a family member (for example, an older brother) has "transitioned." The student expresses his belief in the transgender narrative, and indicates his parents support the transition too. ("My brother used to be a boy, but he's not anymore, so now he is my sister.")

Students who are "out" as trans or nonbinary on social media, but not to their parents or at school. These situations are especially problematic, because the adults (parents and school administrators) are usually the last to know. Peers may feel pressure to validate or "like" their peer's "coming out" posts or may feel torn over whether to tell adults.

A student (or possibly the student's parents) asks the school to recognize the student's asserted identity and make accommodations so the student can be his or her "authentic self" at school.

A student or member of the staff has a family member who has "transitioned." The family member attends school events on site, seeking use of single-sex facilities reserved for the opposite sex.

A teacher posts social media comments that openly support a student (or former student) who is "transitioning."

A teacher or administrator advocates publicly for political candidates or policies that promote gender ideology and contradict Catholic teaching.

A parent group protests publicly against the Catholic school's refusal to use the desired (but inaccurate) pronouns of a "transitioning" student or staff member or the school's policies on gender ideology.

The school discovers that a student was enrolled using a birth certificate that listed the student's post-transition "sex" or "gender" instead of the child's actual sex. This might occur if parents allowed a child to socially transition at a very young age, then changed the child's birth certificate to reflect the desired sex, rather than the child's actual sex, before enrolling the child was enrolled and representing the child as "being" the sex listed on the birth certificate.

A child in the First Communion class or Confirmation class decides he or she is "trans" and requests permission to wear ceremonial clothing typically worn by the opposite sex.

A teen who has a history of mental health issues openly challenges the Church's teaching on transgender issues in the middle of a religion class. The teacher suspects the issue is personal and is torn between wanting to correct the false information asserted by the student (to prevent other students from being led astray) and not wanting to publicly contradict or appear to reject a very vulnerable teen.

These questions, and more, are the kinds that schools should think through ahead of time in order to have clear, consistent answers and approaches to these issues. To support Catholic families, the school staff needs to understand as clearly as possible how gender ideology is affecting their lives. They also need to learn the truth about the person, as taught by the Church, as well as the falsehoods of gender ideology, so that they are well-equipped to share this information with parents and students, as appropriate and according to the bishop's guidance.

### **13. What should I do if a situation involving sexual identity or gender arises in our Catholic school?**

Questions related to sexual identity are complicated and often situation-dependent, but nevertheless affect a wider audience, including potentially the whole parish community or diocese. Thus, it is important for these situations to be brought to the attention of the principal, pastor and bishop, according to diocesan policy. According to the principle of subsidiarity, parents choose a Catholic school to faithfully transmit the teachings of the Catholic faith. As successor to the Apostles, the Bishop has a responsibility to parents and their children to ensure that these teachings are faithfully handed on in Catholic schools, especially in complex situations. As a practical matter, it is important for the diocese to have a unified and consistent response and this requires clear direction from the local bishop. Person and Identity Project resources are offered as a support and resource for schools, subject to the directions of a bishop or pastor.

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