

# BANDINGS

Vol. 40 No. 1

A Publication of New Ways Ministry

Winter 2020-21

## In 'Love Tenderly,' LGBTQ sisters share joys and struggles of self-discovery

By Madeleine Davison  
Global Sisters Report  
December 10, 2020

Mercy Sr. Janet Rozzano discovered she was a lesbian gradually.

During the 1960s and '70s, she became emotionally close with several women, describing her feelings in journal entries filled with both fear and joy, as she wrote in an essay published in *Love Tenderly: Sacred Stories of Lesbian and Queer Religious*, a new anthology available Dec. 15 from New Ways Ministry.

When she gathered the courage to come out, other women in her community supported her, Rozzano told *Global Sisters Report*. Soon, she became an advocate for other LGBTQ Catholics.

"I came to see my telling people — coming out to them — as a ministry in itself," Rozzano said.

Her impact reached fellow Sisters of Mercy, including Sr. Mary Kay Dobrovolny, who describes herself in the book as "unapologetically and enthusiastically queer."

"She's hugely beloved in my community," Dobrovolny said of Rozzano in an interview with GSR. "That cushioned my coming-out significantly. It's a heck of a lot easier to come out when there are other folks who are very well loved, cherished, respected folks in your congregation."

In the anthology, Dobrovolny and Rozzano, along with nearly two dozen other lesbian and queer religious, share personal essays about their vocations and their journeys of self-acceptance — stories of joy and pain, rejection and love.

Amid the struggles of confronting homophobia and shame, many of the writers express the spiritual freedom they have found in discovering their identities and coming out to others. Some describe this freedom as "integration": the ability

to bring their authentic selves to every aspect of their lives.

"I want to be somebody who is fully myself, not partly myself," said Sr. Mary Kay Hunyady of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, one of the book's contributors. "I grew up in an Eastern European family, I was an only girl child, I am a Religious of the Sacred Heart, I am a psychologist ... I am a lesbian. All those are parts of me."

"It's a whole lot of work hiding out from yourself," said another sister, who used the pen name Sister Susan. (Some authors used pen names to protect their privacy.)

One writer, using the pen name Sister Emma, described in her essay an intense prayer encounter where she saw herself standing by the ocean with Jesus. She told Jesus she was a lesbian. Sister Emma wrote that as she prayed, she saw Jesus come to her and lay his head in her lap. She felt peace wash over her.

"This prayer experience ended with a profound and fundamental healing at the core of myself, freeing me to know in the deepest, truest part of my being that God loves me," Sister Emma wrote. "Yes, God truly delights in me as lesbian!"

Sr. Grace Surdovel of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary edited the book with assistance from Immaculate Heart of Mary Sr. Fran Fasolka, who helped plan the anthology and recruit sisters to contribute essays. Surdovel wrote in the acknowledgements that the book is the culmination of 25 years of dreams and plans by a group of lesbian and queer religious.

She said she hopes the book opens the door to new conversations about sexuality within religious congregations and in the larger church, calling it a "necessary step."

"This book [is] going to facilitate

conversations that will impact women, religious communities, their families," Surdovel said. "I think it's going to be very much like the pebble in the pond."

Surdovel and Fasolka, with help from a licensed therapist, wrote reflection questions to help sisters contemplate their personal experiences as LGBTQ religious. Surdovel wrote in the book's acknowledgements that Fasolka reached out to sisters who were part of a group email list she had run since 1995.

The book deals with intense themes. Some of the sisters are survivors of sexual assault, many have experienced painful rejection because of their sexuality, and some struggled with depression and suicidal ideation because they were told being gay was a sin.

"In the stories we read in this book, we see our bruised selves — the places where we were bruised, have been bruised — and come out of that to a place of more integration," Hunyady said.

The book wrestles with the nuances of consecrated celibacy and healthy sexuality, taboo topics among many women religious communities, the contributors told GSR. It also doesn't shy away from the sacrifices some sisters made to enter religious life. Several contributors wrote about leaving behind partners they loved to follow their vocations.

But many of the sisters describe their joy upon discovering their vocations, the meaning and purpose they found in their work as religious, and their sense of community and companionship with women in their communities.

"I love being a sister," Sister Susan said. "I love the energy that I get from [having found myself] and the energy that community has to offer. And the good news is I don't have to choose either one or the other. I can have both."

Loretto Sr. Jeannine Gramick, co-founder of New Ways Ministry, wrote the book's foreword. She said she hopes

it helps bring lesbian and queer women religious into the conversation around LGBTQ people in the Catholic Church.

"It is about time that we have, on the public agenda, stories about lesbian sisters," Gramick said.

Contributors who spoke to GSR said the process of writing the book had been healing for many of them. Dobrovolny said for a long time, she'd felt that her voice was silent or "a solo act."

"To hear my voice in communion with [and] to be one among others in this community is something that has been hugely helpful to me in my own journey," she said.

The writers said they hoped the book would help other lesbian and queer religious — and LGBTQ people more generally — become more comfortable in their identities. It's important for people who have been harmed by the Catholic Church to know there's a distinction between the institution and God, Hunyady said.

"God creates us as we are and loves us," she said.

One sister, who used the pen name Sister J.M. Petria, said she contributed because she "wanted to be a reader."

"I really have appreciated the interaction, the verbal sharing of stories," she said. "Just to see what I've struggled with — have others struggled with that?"

The writers also said they want to help heterosexual women religious as well as clergy and laypeople learn how to better support LGBTQ people in their lives.

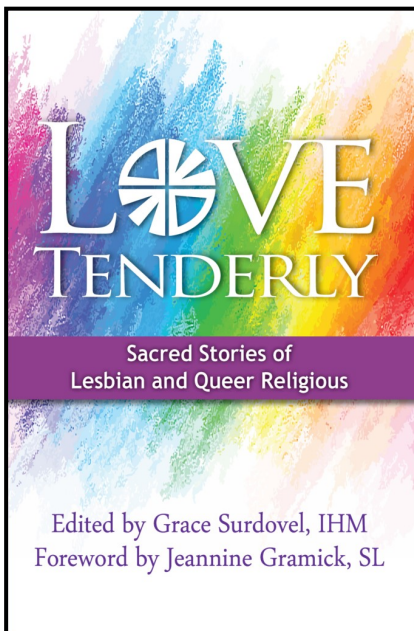
"As you read these stories, my hope is that your heart will be touched in ways that take you deeper into your own story of loving tenderly," Surdovel wrote in the book's acknowledgements. "May you own, honor, and reverence the story of your life." ✦



Grace Surdovel, IHM



Fran Fasolka, IHM



## Catholic bishops sign statement to LGBT youth: 'God created you, God loves you.'

By Michael J. O'Loughlin  
AmericaMagazine.org  
January 25, 2021

A group of U.S. Catholic bishops, including a cardinal and an archbishop, have signed a statement of support for L.G.B.T. youth, telling them, "God created you, God loves you and God is on your side."

"As we see in the Gospels, Jesus Christ taught love, mercy and welcome for all people, especially for those who felt persecuted or marginalized in any way; and the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that LGBT people are to be treated with 'respect, compassion and sensitivity,'" reads the statement, released by the Tyler Clementi Foundation, an organization that fights L.G.B.T. bullying in schools, workplaces and faith communities.

Among those signing the statement were Cardinal Joseph Tobin, archbishop of Newark, and Archbishop John Wester, who leads the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

"All people of goodwill should help, support, and defend LGBT youth; who attempt suicide at much higher rates than their straight counterparts; who are often homeless because of families who reject them; who are rejected, bullied and har-

assed; and who are the target of violent acts at alarming rates," the statement continues.

"The Catholic Church values the God-given dignity of all human life and

have worth, you have value and you're a child of God."

A former high school teacher, Archbishop Wester said bullying can be especially toxic for young people who are

trying to come to terms with their sexual orientation, especially when either they or others misinterpret church teaching on homosexuality to convey the notion that being gay

itself is sinful.

The Catholic Church teaches that homosexuality is "objectively disordered" and condemns sexual acts between people of the same sex as sinful. But at the same time, it says that gay people "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided."

we take this opportunity to say to our LGBT friends, especially young people, that we stand with you and oppose any form of violence, bullying or harassment directed at you."

Archbishop Wester said in a phone interview with *America* that he signed the statement because he wanted L.G.B.T. young people to know "you

Archbishop Wester said young L.G.B.T. people may sometimes misinterpret church teaching about homosexuality and incorrectly think they are somehow cut off from God's love as a result.

"We have our teachings, which we prize and cherish, but those teachings need to be understood in the proper context of love and mercy," he said. "Sometimes people can make equivocations, 'Well if it's a sin to engage in a homosexual act, then I must be a terrible person.' The church doesn't teach that and it's important [young people] don't get that erroneous impression."

He added, "I think it's tragic that young people in the L.G.B.T. community are bullied and made fun of," calling it "another form of bigotry and prejudice that we see in our country today."

Bishop John Stowe, who leads the Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky, told *America* he signed the statement because he has heard from alumni and students in his diocese's Catholic schools who said bullying of L.G.B.T. students can be a serious challenge.

"Sometimes offensive remarks were left unchallenged or even laughed at by faculty," Bishop Stowe said in an email.

(Continued on page 8)





# BONDINGS

Winter 2020-21 Vol. 40, No. 1

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*Bondings* is a seasonal publication designed to keep our subscribers informed of issues that pertain to LGBTQ people and the Catholic Church.

Founded in 1977, New Ways Ministry is an educational and bridge-building ministry of reconciliation between the Catholic LGBTQ community and the institutional structures in the Roman Catholic Church.

New Ways Ministry seeks to eradicate prevalent myths and stereotypes about homosexuality and gender identity and supports equality for LGBTQ persons .

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## How a podcast is helping this Catholic and gay Latino man break the stigma

By **Alejandra Molina**  
*The National Catholic Reporter*  
December 21, 2020

Eder Díaz Santillan vividly remembers a massive mural inside the Catholic church where he worshipped as a child in Mexico. The painting depicted nude and rich people, symbolizing money, sex and power, all vices he learned could lead one to hell. Amid flames, they reached out to God for salvation.

The only thing missing in the painting, Santillan thought, was an image of himself.

"It was very instilled in me that I was a sin, that I was going to hell," said Santillan, 35, who is gay.

Growing up, Santillan never thought he'd feel at peace with his LGBTQ identity, let alone be able to tell his family and friends. This makes it all the more remarkable that today Santillan — who has worked as a radio producer and talent in the Los Angeles area — hosts a Spanish-language podcast, "*De Pueblo, Católico & Gay*," where he openly discusses his identity as a Latino and gay Catholic man.

As he closes his fifth season, Santillan, who is also a lecturer and graduate journalism student at Cal State Northridge, has interviewed more than 85 Latinos in the LGBTQ community.

Most are Catholic, though some are atheist, spiritual or don't belong to a specific religion. He even interviewed his own Catholic parents who supported him after learning of his gay identity. Other interviewees have spoken about undergoing conversion therapy, navigating seminary school and coming out of the closet. Many, like Santillan, have roots in pueblos, small Mexican towns.

Though research shows U.S. Latinos are no longer majority-Catholic, nearly half of them still are. And for Santillan, it's important to highlight how steeped in Catholicism his culture, family life and traditions are, both in the U.S. and in Mexico. Before coming out as gay in his early 20s, he looked for guidance in books, but most were written by white authors who didn't reflect his experience. With his podcast, he hopes to help facilitate conversations between religious Latino parents and their LGBTQ children.

"I want to talk about who I am. I'm from a small town. I'm Catholic and I'm gay," he said. "In these homes, it's hard to speak about issues that don't fit within the church teachings, like divorce, having children out of wedlock and being gay."

During his papacy, Francis has made overtures to creating a more welcoming environment in the Catholic Church. He recently made comments supporting gay civil unions. In 2015, he issued a call to the church to embrace Catholics who have divorced and remarried. Last year, he met with American Jesuit priest Fr. James Martin at the Vatican to discuss LGBTQ Catholics — a move some saw as support for a priest who has called on Catholics to be more compassionate to LGBTQ people.

Santillan's upbringing in the small Jalisco town of Encarnacion de Díaz was immersed in the church. He has an uncle who is a Franciscan friar, a cousin who is a nun and an older brother who studied to become a priest. The town is centered around the main local parish. Growing up, he said he heard priests condemn homosexuality in their sermons and homophobic family gossip about those thought to be gay.

As a child and in his early teens, Santillan would pray to not be gay.

"I wanted to be able to like girls so one day I could

get married and fulfill that part of the religion and procreate and have children and make my parents happy," he said. "When it wouldn't come true, that's when I started to think, 'wow he [God] really hates me.'"

Santillan distanced himself from the Catholic faith while at college at Cal State Northridge in the San Fernando Valley. He met other LGBTQ people who introduced him to gay clubs in West Hollywood. He made friends with people who were Buddhist, Christian and who belonged to spiritual groups that were inclusive of the gay community.

Around that time, he went to Europe with a friend and spent time in Rome. He remembers walking into a small chapel and seeing a shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Immediately, he said, "I felt like I was seeing my mom. That's how I was raised to see her."

Santillan recognized he couldn't separate himself from his Catholic upbringing. He spoke with a couple of Franciscan priests in and outside his family who affirmed he could maintain his faith and gay identity. He decided to reconcile with his faith and the church.

"I started to learn that there's a difference between what God and my relationship with him looks like ... and what somebody with maybe their own internalized homophobia from an altar is trying to tell me God thinks of me,"

Santillan said. "That's how I started to reconcile with those things." Through his interviews, Santillan realized just how many people like him prayed to be accepted by their church community and families.

"I think a lot of people assume we would hate the church, but that was the only thing we were clinging on to, and we wanted acceptance from God," Santillan said.

"Religion just adds this extra level of guilt to the

queer experience that is often not talked about," he added.

In one interview on the podcast, a woman who grew up in the Catholic faith said she realized she liked girls at the age of 10 and would "ask God to change me ... because I didn't want to be rejected."

In another episode, Edwin Soto, a Christian man, recalled telling his mother he was gay and he believed God still loved him. She responded by saying she also loved him but brought up the Bible's teachings.

"You know what we believe, what the Bible says about men who sleep with men," he recalled her telling him. "I said, 'yes, mom. I know. I have been the one who has fought this for more than 20 years.'"

Santillan said most of those featured reached out to him for an interview after listening to the podcast. Feedback has been positive, mostly from people who identify with it on a personal level or from mothers who want to connect with their kids. He has gotten at least two direct messages from Catholic priests.

"They praise my work, but when I have extended them invitations to be on the podcast, because I have yet to have a priest on, they all politely decline," Santillan said.

Santillan said he is encouraged by Pope Francis' statements about the LGBTQ community and is also inspired by the work of Fr. James Martin.

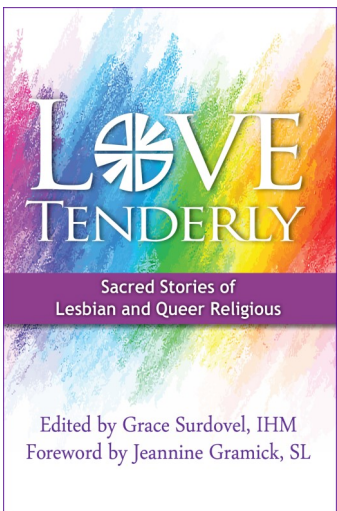
"I still have hope for the church, but I understand it's going to take a lot of work for the church to get there," Santillan said. "That's why I'm happy people like me don't leave the church, because we're the ones that are going to do the work."

Santillan said he prays every day and confesses directly to God but no longer asks God to change who he is.

"I know God made me the way I am, because I asked him to change me and he didn't," Santillan said. "God wants me to be this way." ✝



Eder Díaz Santillan, right, with his mother, Maria Guadalupe.



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(see article on page one)



# Guyana Bishop Calls for Nation’s Gay Criminalization Laws to Be “Null and Void”

By Robert Shine  
*Bondings 2.0*  
NewWaysMinistry.org/blog  
December 4, 2020

A bishop in the Caribbean has called for laws in his country that criminalize homosexuality to be made “null and void.”

Bishop Francis Alleyne of Georgetown, Guyana, made his comments as the keynote speaker at “Intim – ate Conviction 2: Continuing the Decriminalization Conference,” a gathering that focused on the relationship between religious groups and anti-LGBTQ laws in the Global South. The conference occurred via Zoom from November 25-27, 2020.

Alleyne spoke about his experiences in Guyana, as well as those of his brother bishops in the Antilles Episcopal Conference, which covers 19 dioceses in the Caribbean. The bishop said that in Guyana, criminalization laws are rarely enforced, but when they are, the enforcement is usually done cruelly. Alleyne then stated:

“There is no doubt in my mind that these laws in Guyana should be made null and void.”

The bishop added that in speaking with other Caribbean bishops, eleven of whom serve dioceses where homosexuality is criminalized, the question is “not a front burner issue for them,” but “generally they would have no objection having these laws removed from the books.”

Alleyne’s described his aim in addressing the conference was to offer “something to an important discussion, something that can be freeing, life-giving, and hopefully add to the vocabulary.” Much of his address, therefore, was dedicated to possible pastoral initiatives. Citing a 2013 study on attitudes surrounding homosexuality in the Caribbean, the bishop said even people who condemned lesbian and gay people in the abstract were far more accepting when it came to a loved one or co-worker.

The bishop told the story of a woman estranged from her gay nephew. Yet,

when he was dying of AIDS, she overcame the “struggle between her loyalty to church teachings and loyalty to family” and visited him. This act, Alleyne said, “would be an example of a person’s vocabulary increasing while putting fears to rest.” That is precisely what Christians should be doing, he observed.

The Guyanese bishop also spoke about using Scripture responsibly, comparing the conversation on criminalizing homosexuality to a different conversation held in Guyana about corporal punishment. Alleyne commented on how quickly proponents of physical abuse turned to the Bible. He said:

“So often the default response to the topic is to find a scriptural reference and to quote it authoritatively...in doing so, we hide behind texts. We sidestep our responsibility to real people, in real circumstances, in real time. . .If we are going to draw from the texts of Scripture in Christianity, particularly the gospels, they are there to push back boundaries [and to open the possibility of flourishing to all people].”

Alleyne concluded his talk by noting, “The way of love asks much more of us.” It asks us to accompany people, be available to them, and be patient, affirming, and encouraging throughout.

In 2017, Bishop Alleyne co-hosted an interfaith prayer service with the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination to kick off Pride celebrations that year, an event held at the local Catholic Life Centre. The bishop at the time described homosexuality as a “volatile” issue given there was “a lot of fear and insufficient listening to expect an objective response from people.” Alleyne’s response sharply contrasted with, and



Bishop Francis Alleyne

was criticized by, more conservative Christian groups who made anti-LGBTQ statements about Pride.

Other speakers at both this conference addressed Catholicism and criminalization. Carlos Navarro, co-chair of Mexico Network of Rainbow Catholics (REDCAM), spoke on decriminalization efforts in Latin America. He shared that the day of his presentation at the conference was his tenth wedding anniversary, and encouraged LGBTQ people to avail themselves of their rights once ratified in law. On founding one of Mexico’s first Catholic LGBTQ groups, Navarro said:

“I wanted to go back to my Catholic practice as I had always known it but with people who were like me, and even more important, [to be able to speak about] the way I was.”

Navarro also told attendees about a meeting this year between REDCAM and Mexican church leaders, including Archbishop Rogelio Cabrera López of Monterrey. He concluded that the Catholic Church has often “been a force against LGBTQ rights,” yet he added

“... But I’ve also had a chance to talk to cardinals and work with them and bishops conferences. One thing that I have concluded is that these people in positions of power are just as feeble and as limited as we all are. And they just need encouragement. They need to be put in a position that they can actually change things. What I have seen in the Catholic Church, and in our government, and in the U.S. government, is a great potential for good. I think that when they [religious and civic leaders] want to do that, and we press them to do certain things. . .I have seen a church that works

for the poor and provides a spiritual accompaniment.”

Luke Sinnette, a social worker at Friends for Life, an agency that serves HIV+ people in Trinidad and Tobago, also discussed his experiences with the Catholic Church. The blog *76 Crimes* reported:

“Sinnette used his own experiences to make the point that emotional problems for LGBT people are caused not only by homophobic church teachings, but also by families and schools paying no attention to gay youths’ experiences. “He told of the isolation, confusion and alienation he experienced when he first felt same-sex attractions as a teenager. The Roman Catholic Church, which had been ‘a source of comfort’, became ‘a burdensome place that I painfully endured.’ . . .

“He was not confronted with anti-gay statements at church or in his family. Instead, the topic was never mentioned — as if ‘it were not real and so I believed it was not’.”

These experiences and intensified bullying led Sinnette to engage in self-harm, and he explained about leaving the church. “I was sure that if I wanted to be a good Catholic I would end up killing myself.”

At the first Intimate Conviction conference three years ago, New Ways Ministry’s Executive Director Francis DeBernardo gave an address recounting the all-too-varied ways that Catholic bishops have addressed LGBTQ criminalization laws around the globe, with some opposing the laws while others supported them.

Bishop Alleyne’s decision to prioritize the church’s commitment to human rights for all people over a condemnatory sexual ethics is the right approach, and it is the approach that saves lives. When being LGBTQ remains criminalized in 70-plus countries around the globe, more church leaders, especially those in these nations, need to echo Alleyne’s clear call for an end to such discriminatory laws. ✦

## LGBT Catholics seek voice in Brazilian Church

By Eduardo Campos Lima  
*Crux*  
Dec 5, 2020

SÃO PAULO – Although ministry to the LGBT Catholic community in the United States is common, in Brazil it still exists largely in the shadows.

Most LGBT Catholic groups lead a parallel existence with the Church, although in 2014 a network of 23 such groups was formed in the country.

Although this puts Brazil’s Catholic LGBT movement decades behind the United States, the network is still a fairly rapid development: The oldest LGBT association, Diversidade Católica [Catholic Diversity] was only created in Rio de Janeiro in 2006.

A handful of diversity pastoral care commissions also have been established in connection to dioceses in the same period, including in Nova Iguaçu, in Rio de Janeiro State, where it was officially created in 2017.

Except for such pastoral commissions, most of the other groups don’t hold their meetings in parishes or in other Church-owned spaces, preferring instead to gather in independent locations.

Several of them opt to not publicly announcing the encounters, in order to avoid attracting undesirable attention, with potential attendees being interviewed before receiving information on meetings.

“Politically, it’s a very sensitive moment concerning possible relations between us and the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil [CNBB]. The



Cris Serra

CNBB is under much pressure from ultraconservatives, who are strongly aligned with President Jair Bolsonaro and his anti-human rights agenda,” said Cris Serra, the network’s coordinator.

Indeed, the LGBT movement has turned out to be one of the main targets of Bolsonaro’s supporters, including in the Catholic sphere.

In May 2019, shortly after the Archbishop of Belo Horizonte Walmor Oliveira de Azevedo was elected the new president of the CNBB, a Bolsonaroist YouTuber released a video attacking him due to the existence of a pastoral care commission for diversity in his archdiocese.

Azevedo denied the group was for LGBT Catholics in Belo Horizonte, saying it was a pastoral service for families with relationship problems.

Serra, who is a psychologist and identifies as a non-binary person, claimed the Catholic right-wing in Brazil currently has a great power to mobilize people and to exert financial pressure on the Church.

Despite such difficulties, most LGBT groups are accompanied by at least one priest.

“We have a network of allied priests, as we call them. Most of them are members of religious congregations, so they don’t suffer too much pressure from the diocese,” Serra said. Jesuits and Redemptorists have been the most helpful congregations.

Most meetings involve group discussions followed by a Mass, with many

priests saying it’s common that some participants break into tears as they feel embraced by a Catholic community again.

“In the church, we’re commonly silenced and demonized. Some of us are physically assaulted during exorcisms and other similar practices,” Serra said.

João Victor Oliveira, a Catholic historian who investigates the trajectories of young LGBT Catholics, says the effects of such actions can be long lasting.

“Most of us have profound scars. Extremely violent processes have shaped our subjectivities in the Church. It’s common to have deep resentment and to believe forever that we’re naturally sinful,” he told *Crux*.

One of the network’s concerns is to offer a safe space for the participants.

“Nobody is able to identify as a Catholic LGBT individual without a safety network. That’s why so many groups have been formed,” Oliveira explained.

Such a safety network not only includes LGBT people, but also their parents. In Curitiba, in Paraná State, Silvia Kreuz and other parents of LGBT Catholics created a few years ago a group called Mães de Amor Incondicional [Mothers of Unconditional Love], known as MAMI.

Kreuz and a friend were catechists in a parish and their children came out as homosexuals at the same time.

“We suffered an enormous rejection from the community,” she told *Crux*,



Silvia Kreuz

adding she was forced to leave her community.

One day, she decided to hold a meeting with other mothers of homosexual sons and daughters.

“One of the participants didn’t accept her lesbian daughter. After much talk, she finally changed her mind,” she said. That’s how MAMI began.

The archdiocese of Curitiba promptly accepted and encouraged MAMI’s work. A year earlier, it had established a group of pastoral assistance to LGBT people.

Soon, Kreuz was being invited to talk about her experience in parishes and to ecclesial groups across the country.

“There are many conservative movements trying to question our work, but what I see is an institution eager for answers,” she said. Kreuz said the success of a group like MAMI in a diocese is affected by the amount of institutional support it receives.

Oliveira said that since a more sympathetic stance is not possible among Catholic leaders in Brazil, many Catholic LGBT groups have been allied with other Christian movements.

“We’re nurtured by marginal theologies of different kinds. Ecumenism is one of the basic characteristics of our groups’ ideas,” Oliveira said.

“We’re not much concerned with justifying our positions or asking the Church’s permission to get in. We know we’re God’s beloved sons and daughters and that we’re Christ’s followers,” Serra added. ✦



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*Oakland:* Our Lady of Lourdes, St. Columba, St. Jarleth  
*Oceanside:* St. Thomas More  
*Orange:* Holy Family Cathedral  
*Orangevale:* Divine Savior  
*Palm Springs:* St. Theresa, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Solitude  
*Pasadena:* Assumption of the B.V.M.  
*Redondo:* St. Lawrence Martyr  
*Redwood City:* St. Matthias  
*Ross:* St. Anselm  
*Sacramento:* St. Francis of Assisi  
*San Carlos:* St. Charles  
*San Diego:* Ascension, St. John the Evangelist, St. Jude Shrine, Catholic Community of UC San Diego  
*San Dimas:* Holy Name of Mary  
*San Francisco:* Most Holy Redeemer, Old St. Mary Cathedral, St. Agnes, St. Dominic, St. Ignatius, St. Teresa of Avila  
*San Jose:* St. Julie Billiart,  
*San Luis Obispo:* Mission San Luis  
*San Ramon:* St. Joan of Arc  
*San Raphael:* Church of San Raphael & Mission San Raphael Arcangel  
*Santa Barbara:* OL of Guadalupe  
*Santa Cruz:* Holy Cross  
*Santa Monica:* St. Monica  
*Spring Valley:* Santa Sophia  
*Stanford:* Catholic Community at Stanford University  
*South Pasadena:* Holy Family  
*Valinda:* St. Martha  
*Vernon:* Holy Angels Catholic Church of the Deaf  
*Walnut Creek:* St. John Vianney  
*West Hollywood:* St. Ambrose, St. Victor  
*Whittier:* St. Mary of the Assumption  
*Woodland Hills:* St. Mel

**Colorado**  
*Arvada:* Spirit of Christ  
*Avon:* St. Edward  
*Colorado Springs:* Sacred Heart,

LGBTQ-friendly Catholic Parishes & Communities

Below is a list of known LGBTQ-friendly Catholic parishes and intentional Eucharistic communities. Thank you for helping us add to this growing list. If you are aware of a parish or community that welcomes LGBTQ Catholics, please let us know. Tell us if this welcome is because of a support program, spirituality group, mission statement, participation in LGBTQ community events, or involvement with parents. For links to many of these parishes’ websites, go to [www.NewWaysMinistry.org/resources/parishes](http://www.NewWaysMinistry.org/resources/parishes).

To recommend a community for the list, please email [info@newwaysministry.org](mailto:info@newwaysministry.org) or call 301-277-5674. Parishes are listed first and intentional Eucharistic communities follow. If you learn that any of the places on this list are no longer LGBTQ-friendly, please inform us of that, too.

Our Lady of the Pines  
*Denver:* St. Dominic, Christ the King, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, St. Ignatius Loyola  
*Lafayette:* Immaculate Conception  
*Lakewood:* St. Bernadette  
*Littleton:* Light of the World, St. Frances Cabrini

**Connecticut**  
*Guilford:* St. George’s  
*Hartford:* St. Patrick-St. Anthony  
*New Haven:* St. Thomas More Chapel

**Delaware**  
*North Wilmington:* Holy Child  
*Wilmington:* St. Joseph, Sacred Heart Oratory

**District of Columbia**  
Holy Trinity, St. Matthew Cathedral

**Florida**  
*Cocoa Beach:* Our Savior  
*Daytona Beach:* Our Lady of Lourdes  
*Flagler Beach:* Santa Maria del Mar  
*Ft. Lauderdale:* Blessed Sacrament, St. Anthony, St. Maurice  
*Pensacola:* Cathedral of the Sacred Heart  
*Key West:* Basilica of St. Mary Star of the Sea  
*Tampa:* Sacred Heart

**Georgia**  
*Atlanta:* Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

**Idaho**  
*Boise:* St. Mary

**Illinois**  
*Berwyn:* St. Mary of the Celle  
*Chicago:* Immaculate Conception, St. Clement, St. Gertrude, St. Gregory, St. Peter, St. Sylvester, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Thomas the Apostle, Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Old St. Patrick  
*Clarendon Hills:* Notre Dame  
*Country Club Hills:* St. Emeric  
*Evanston:* St. Nicholas  
*Inverness:* Holy Family  
*Johnston City:* St. Paul  
*Morton Grove:* St. Martha  
*Oak Park:* Ascension, St. Catherine of Sienna-St. Lucy, St. Giles  
*Schaumburg:* St. Marcelline

**Indiana**  
*Dyer:* St. Maria Goretti  
*Franklin:* St. Rose of Lima  
*Indianapolis:* St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Gabriel the Archangel, St. Pius X

**Iowa**  
*Coralville:* St. Thomas More  
*Des Moines:* Holy Trinity

**Kentucky**  
*Lexington:* Historic St. Paul Church, St. Peter Claver  
*Louisville:* Epiphany, Cathedral of the

Assumption, St. William, Our Lady of Lourdes

**Louisiana**  
*New Orleans:* St. Augustine

**Maine**  
*Portland:* Sacred Heart-St. Dominic, Our Lady of Hope  
*Saco:* Most Holy Trinity

**Maryland**  
*Baltimore:* Corpus Christi, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius, St. Matthew, St. Vincent dePaul  
*Columbia:* St. John the Evangelist  
*Gaithersburg:* St. Rose of Lima  
*Hagerstown:* St. Ann  
*Severn:* St. Bernadette

**Massachusetts**  
*Amherst:* Newman Catholic Center of UMass  
*Boston:* St. Joseph, Paulist Center, St. Anthony Shrine, St. Cecilia  
*Brimfield:* St. Christopher  
*Buzzard’s Bay:* St. Margaret’s/St. Mary’s  
*East Longmeadow:* St. Michael  
*Medford:* Catholic Community at Tufts University  
*Monson:* St. Patrick  
*Newton:* St. Ignatius  
*Provincetown:* St. Peter  
*Sharon:* Our Lady of Sorrows  
*Springfield:* Sacred Heart  
*Westford:* Blessed Trinity  
*Whitinsville:* St. Patrick

**Michigan**  
*Ann Arbor:* St. Mary Student Parish  
*Detroit:* St. Leo, Christ the King, Gesu Parish, Ss. Peter and Paul  
*Livonia:* St. Edith  
*St. Ignace:* St. Ignatius Loyola  
*Westland:* Ss. Simon and Jude

**Minnesota**  
*Minneapolis:* St. Frances Cabrini, St. Joan of Arc  
*St. Paul:* St. Thomas More

**Missouri**  
*Kansas City:* Guardian Angels, Holy Family, St. James, St. Francis Xavier  
*St. Joseph:* St. Francis Xavier  
*St. Louis:* St. Cronan, St. Margaret of Scotland, St. Pius V

**Montana**  
*Billings:* Holy Rosary, St. Pius X

**Nebraska**  
*Omaha:* Sacred Heart, St. John Parish (Creighton University)

**Nevada**  
*Las Vegas:* Christ the King, Guardian Angel Cathedral

**New Hampshire**  
*Merrimack:* St. John Neumann  
*Pelham:* St. Patrick

**New Jersey**  
*Berkeley Heights:* Little Flower  
*Cherry Hill:* Christ Our Light  
*Clifton:* St. Philip the Apostle  
*Hoboken:* Our Lady of Grace  
*Lawrenceville:* St. Ann  
*Long Beach Island:* St. Francis of Assisi  
*Maplewood:* St. Joseph  
*Marlton:* St. Joan of Arc  
*Monmouth:* Precious Blood  
*Pompton Lakes:* St. Mary  
*River Edge:* St. Peter the Apostle  
*South Plainfield:* Sacred Heart

*Turnersville:* Sts. Peter and Paul

**New Mexico**  
*Albuquerque:* Holy Family, San Felipe de Neri  
*Espanola:* Sacred Heart of Jesus

**New York**  
*Albany:* St. Vincent DePaul  
*Baldwinsville:* St. Augustine  
*Bellmore:* St. Barnabas the Apostle  
*Bellport:* Mary Immaculate  
*Binghamton:* St. Francis of Assisi  
*Brooklyn:* St. Andrew the Apostle, St. Boniface, St. Athanasius, St. Augustine, Immaculate. Heart of Mary  
*Buffalo:* St. Joseph University Parish  
*Deer Park:* Ss. Cyril and Methodius  
*East Islip:* St. Mary  
*Elmira:* St. Mary  
*Fairport:* Church of the Assumption  
*Henrietta:* Good Shepherd  
*Ithaca:* St. Catherine of Siena  
*Manhattan:* Ascension, Blessed Sacrament, Holy Name of Jesus, St. Francis deSales, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis Xavier, St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Paul the Apostle  
*Pittsford:* Church of Transfiguration  
*Rochester:* Blessed Sacrament, St. Mary (Downtown), St. Monica  
*Saratoga Springs:* St. Peter  
*Schenectady:* St. Luke  
*Syracuse:* St. Lucy, All Saints  
*Utica:* Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Historic Old St. John’s  
*Wading River:* St. John the Baptist  
*Wantagh:* St. Frances de Chantal  
*West Islip:* Our Lady of Lourdes  
*Westbury:* St. Brigid

**North Carolina**  
*Charlotte:* St. Peter  
*Durham:* Immaculate Conception  
*Fayetteville:* St. Patrick  
*Raleigh:* St. Francis of Assisi

**Ohio**  
*Akron:* St. Bernard  
*Centerville:* St. Leonard  
*Cincinnati:* St. Robert Bellarmine, St. Francis de Sales  
*Cleveland:* Blessed Trinity, St. Malachi, St. Martha  
*Columbus:* St. Thomas More Newman Center, St. Francis of Assisi  
*Fairlawn:* St. Hilary  
*Mentor:* St. John Vianney  
*University Heights:* Church of Gesu  
*Westlake:* St. Ladislav

**Oklahoma**  
*Tulsa:* St. Jerome

**Oregon**  
*Beaverton:* Spirit of Grace  
*Portland:* St. Andrew, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Phillip Neri, Downtown Chapel (St. Vincent de Paul), St. Ignatius

**Pennsylvania**  
*Danville:* St. Joseph  
*Latrobe:* St. Vincent Basilica  
*Philadelphia:* Old St. Joseph, Old St. Mary, St. John the Evangelist, St. Vincent DePaul  
*Wallingford:* St. John Chrysostom  
*Wilksburg:* St. James

**Rhode Island**  
*Providence:* St. Raymond  
*Warwick:* Sts. Rose & Clement  
*Wickford:* St. Bernard





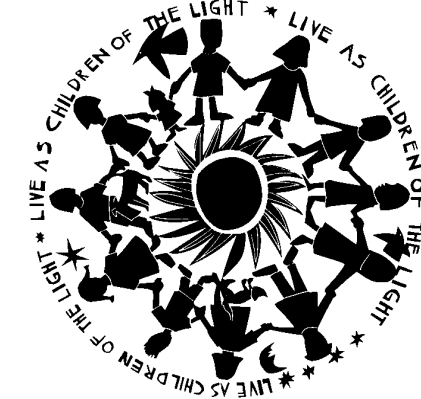
LGBTQ-friendly Catholic Parishes & Communities (continued)

(Continued from page 4)

**Tennessee**  
*Memphis:* St. Patrick, Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

**Texas**  
*Austin:* Univ.of Texas Catholic Center  
*Colleyville:* Good Shepherd  
*Dallas:* Holy Trinity  
*El Paso:* All Saints  
*Houston:* St. Anne, St. Teresa  
*Odessa:* St. Elizabeth Ann Seton  
*Plano:* St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

**Virginia**  
*Arlington:* Our Lady Queen of Peace  
*Glen Allen:* St. Michael the Archangel  
*Mechanicsville:* Church of the Redeemer  
*Richmond:* Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Sacred Heart Parish  
*Roanoke:* St. Gerard  
*Triangle:* St. Francis  
*Virginia Beach:* St. Nicholas



**Washington**  
*Seattle:* Christ Our Hope, St. Benedict, St. James Cathedral, St. Joseph, St. Mary’s  
*Spokane:* St. Aloysius  
*Tacoma:* St. Leo

**Wisconsin**  
*De Pere:* St. Norbert College Parish  
*Fond du Lac:* Holy Family  
*Madison:* Our Lady Queen of Peace  
*Menomonee Falls:* Good Shepherd  
*Milwaukee:* St. Bernadette, Good Shepherd, Prince of Peace, Trinity-Guadalupe, Our Lady of Lourdes  
*Wauwatosa:* St. Pius X

**Outside the U.S.**

**Canada**  
*Montreal:* Holy Cross, Saint-Pierre- Apôtre,  
*Ottawa:* St. Joseph  
*Toronto:* Our Lady of Lourdes

**England**  
*Bristol:* St. Nicholas of Tolentino

*London:* Church of the Immaculate Conception (Farm Street Church, Mayfair)  
*York:* Bar Convent (Middlesborough Diocese LGBT+ Ministry)

**Northern Ireland**  
*Belfast:* Clonard Monastery Parish

**South Africa**  
*Johannesburg:* Holy Trinity

INTENTIONAL EUCHARISTIC COMMUNITIES

**Arizona**  
*Scottsdale:* Franciscan Renewal Center

**California**  
*Bermuda Dunes:* St. Clare of Assisi  
*Pleasanton:* Catholic Community of Pleasanton  
*San Diego:* Mary Magdalene Catholic Community  
*San Francisco:* Dignity/San Francisco

**District of Columbia**  
Communitas, Dignity/Washington

**Florida**  
*Tampa:* Franciscan Center

**Iowa**  
*Coralville:* Full Circle Small Faith Community

**Maryland**  
*Baltimore, Annapolis, Thurmont:* Living Water Inclusive Catholic

Community  
*Greenbelt:* Greenbelt Catholic Community

**Michigan**  
*Grand Rapids:* Marywood Spirituality Center  
*Kalamazoo:* Lambda Catholic

**Minnesota**  
*Minneapolis:* Spirit of St. Stephen's Catholic Community

**Ohio**  
Dayton: Living Beatitudes Community

**Oregon**  
*Portland:* Journey and Koinonia Catholic Community

**Pennsylvania**  
*Drexel Hill:* St. Mary Magdalene Community

*Pittsburgh:* Dignity//Pittsburgh

**Virginia**  
*Arlington:* NOVA Catholic Community  
*McLean:* PAX Community

**Washington**  
*Lacey:* Holy Wisdom Inclusive Catholic Community

**Wisconsin**  
*Madison:* Holy Wisdom Monastery  
*Milwaukee:* Mary of Magdala, Apostle to the Apostles

**Outside the U.S.**

**Ireland**  
*Dublin:* Orlagh in the City

**Korea**  
*Seoul:* Alpha Omega Commuinity

LGBTQ-friendly Catholic Colleges and Universities

Below is a list of known LGBTQ-friendly Catholic colleges and universities, that is, those Catholic institutions that have some type of LGBTQ student group, support group, ally group, program, or policy. If you are aware of such a college that is known as welcoming to LGBTQ people, please contact New Ways Ministry. Phone: 301-277-5674; Email: info@newwaysministry.org.



**Alabama**  
*Mobile:* Spring Hill College

**California**  
*Belmont:* Notre Dame de Namur University  
*Goleta:* St. Mark’s University  
*Los Angeles:* Loyola Marymount University, Mount Saint Mary’s College  
*Moraga:* St. Mary’s College  
*Oakland:* Holy Names University  
*Ranchos Palos Verde:* Marymount College  
*San Diego:* University of San Diego  
*San Francisco:* University of San Francisco  
*Santa Clara:* Santa Clara University

**Colorado**  
*Denver:* Regis University

**Connecticut**  
*Fairfield:* Fairfield University, Sacred Heart University  
*New Haven:* Albertus Magnus College  
*West Hartford:* Saint Joseph College

**District of Columbia**  
Georgetown University, Trinity University

**Florida**  
*Miami Gardens:* St. Thomas University  
*Miami Shores:* Barry University

**Hawaii**  
*Honolulu:* Chaminade University

**Illinois**  
*Chicago:* DePaul University, Loyola University, St. Xavier University  
*Joliet:* University of St. Francis  
*River Forest:* Dominican University in Illinois  
*Romeoville:* Lewis University

**Indiana**  
*Hammond:* Calumet College  
*Notre Dame:* Holy Cross College,

St. Mary’s College, Univ. of Notre Dame

**Iowa**  
*Davenport:* St. Ambrose University  
*Dubuque:* Loras College, Clarke University

**Kentucky**  
*Louisville:* Spalding University, Bellarmine University

**Louisiana**  
*New Orleans:* Loyola University

**Maryland**  
*Baltimore:* Notre Dame of Maryland University, Loyola University of Maryland

**Massachusetts**  
*Boston:* Emmanuel College,  
*Chestnut Hill:* Boston College  
*Chicopee:* Elms College  
*Easton:* Stonehill College  
*North Andover:* Merrimack College  
*Weston:* Regis College  
*Worcester:* Assumption College, College of the Holy Cross

**Michigan**  
*Detroit:* University of Detroit Mercy, Marygrove College  
*Grand Rapids:* Aquinas College

**Minnesota**  
*Collegeville:* St. John’s University  
*Duluth:* College of St. Scholastica  
*Minneapolis:* College of St. Catherine  
*St. Joseph:* College of Saint Benedict  
*St. Paul:* St. Thomas University  
*Winona:* St. Mary’s University of Minnesota

**Missouri**  
*Kansas City:* Avila University, Rockhurst University  
*St. Louis:* Fontbonne University, Maryville University, St. Louis University

**Montana**  
*Helena:* Carroll College

**Nebraska**  
*Omaha:* Creighton University

**New Hampshire**  
*Manchester:* St. Anselm College  
*Nashua:* Rivier College

**New Jersey**  
*Caldwell:* Caldwell College  
*Jersey City:* St. Peter’s College  
*Newark:* Seton Hall School of Law

**New York**  
*Albany:* College of Saint Rose  
*Brooklyn and Patchogue:* St. Joseph’s College  
*Bronx:* Fordham University, Manhattan College  
*Buffalo:* Canisius College  
*Loudonville:* Siena College  
*New Rochelle:* College of New Rochelle, Iona College  
*Poughkeepsie:* Marist College  
*Riverdale:* College of Mt. St. Vincent  
*Rochester:* St. John Fisher College  
*St. Bonaventure:* St. Bonaventure Univ.  
*Sparkill:* St. Thomas Aquinas College  
*Syracuse:* LeMoyne College  
*Queens:* St. John’s University

**Ohio**  
*Cincinnati:* Xavier University  
*Cleveland Heights:* John Carroll University  
*Dayton:* University of Dayton  
*Pepper Pike:* Ursuline College  
*South Euclid:* Notre Dame College  
*Sylvania:* Lourdes University

**Oregon**  
*Marylhurst:* Marylhurst University  
*Portland:* University of Portland

**Pennsylvania**  
*Cresson:* Mount Aloysius College  
*Dallas:* Misericordia University

*Erie:* Mercyhurst College  
*Greensburg:* Seton Hill University  
*Immaculata:* Immaculata University  
*Philadelphia:* Chestnut Hill College, LaSalle University, St. Joseph’s University  
*Pittsburgh:* Carlow University, Duquesne University  
*Radnor:* Cabrini College  
*Reading:* Alvernia University  
*Scranton:* Marywood University  
*Villanova:* Villanova University

**Rhode Island**  
*Newport:* Salve Regina University  
*Providence:* Providence College

**Texas**  
*Austin:* Saint Edward’s University  
*San Antonio:* University of the Incarnate Word, Our Lady of the Lake University, St. Mary’s University

**Vermont**  
*Colchester:* Saint Michael’s College

**Washington**  
*Lacey:* St. Martin’s University  
*Seattle:* Seattle University  
*Spokane:* Gonzaga University

**West Virginia**  
*Wheeling:* Wheeling Jesuit University

**Wisconsin**  
*De Pere:* St. Norbert College  
*Madison:* Edgewood College  
*Milwaukee:* Alverno College, Cardinal Stritch University, Marquette University

**Outside the U.S.**

**Canada**  
*Toronto:* Regis College

## Pope's phone call helps children of Italian gay couple become Catholic

By **Joshua J. McElwee**  
*The National Catholic Reporter*  
 Feb 5-18, 2021

**ROME**—Thanks to the personal intervention of Pope Francis, three young children of one Italian gay couple are being brought up in the Catholic faith and even ministering as altar servers.

About five years ago, Andrea Rubera and his husband Dario were considering whether to enroll their oldest child, then about 3, in a catechetical program at a Rome-area parish. But they were afraid their child might be treated differently, or be subject to some sort of prejudice.

When by chance Rubera was asked in April 2015 if he would be part of a group invited to participate in the pope's

daily Mass at the Vatican's Santa Marta guesthouse, the gay Italian Catholic brought a letter to give to Francis, laying

out his dilemma.

Days later, Rubera got an unexpected phone call. "I answered and it was the voice of the pope asking me, 'Mr. Rubera, is that you?'" Rubera recounted to NCR.

"I think you should do it," Rubera remembers the pope saying. "Go to the pastor, ask for a meeting, introduce yourself transparently and I'm quite confident that everything is going to be all right."

The layman did as the pope suggested. His three children have now each gone

through the catechetical program and minister as altar servers. And the oldest is preparing to receive first Communion.

Rubera previously spoke about his personal experience with Francis as part of the documentary "Francesco," directed by Evgeny Afineevsky and released last year. He says now that the pope's advice offered a "fundamental step" in his family's life.

"It was something that really helped me in coming out of a cul-de-sac," said the Italian.

Although Rubera said he hasn't spoken to Francis since their first phone call, he said he has been able to make sure the pope received a second letter, reporting on his children's progress.

"I'm happy to be sure that he got the news of how our kids are doing," said Rubera. "I'm not expecting he's going to call me again." ✚



Andrea Rubera and Dario De Gregorio with their children.

## US Bishops should follow Pope Francis' lead on same-sex civil unions

By **Michael G. Lawler**  
 and **Todd A. Salzman**  
*NovenaNews.com*  
 November 12, 2020

The internet and media have been in a frenzy since the release of Evgeny Afineevsky's documentary on Pope Francis entitled simply "Francesco." The documentary's goal is to show the impact Francis has had on people and their lives on his various journeys around the world, but what has caused the frenzy is a statement the Pope made about the legalization of same-sex civil unions.

The Pope's comment came in response to a letter he had received from an Italian gay couple asking him how they should live as a united couple and raise their children in a church that does not accept their union but judges it intrinsically evil and sinful.

Homosexuals, the Pope responded, "have a right to be part of the family. They are children of God and have a right to a family." No Bishop and no Catholic who understands the church's social teaching about the God-created dignity of all women and men could challenge that statement.

The Catholic sticking point, of course, is not that gays and lesbians have a right to a family but whether they have a right to be married in the Catholic church. The answer to that question is a firm Catholic no, and it is at this point that the issue of civil unions arises.

"What we have to create," Francis added, "is a civil union law. That way [same-sex couples] are protected. I stood up for that."

That last sentence reveals something crucial: not "I stand up for that," as if this is the first time he had supported civil unions, but "I stood up for that," as in this is not the first time I have urged civil unions, I have done so already in my past life.

Jorge Bergoglio stood up for civil unions in his time as Archbishop of Buenos Aires. The Argentine government was debating introducing a law allowing same-sex marriage. Cardinal Bergoglio was opposed to such a law and he urged his fellow bishops to support a law legalizing civil unions between same-sex couples in order to protect the privileges of marriage between a man and a woman.

He failed in both efforts. His fellow bishops would not support civil unions and the Argentine government eventually enacted a law permitting and supporting same-sex marriage. Bergoglio described that law as "a destructive attack on God's plan," presumably for heterosexual marriage.

Francis also spoke in support of civil unions in a 2014 interview in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* and in a 2017 interview with the French sociologist Dominique Wolton. . . .

Let there be no doubt, however. The Pope's public urging of civil unions for gay and lesbian couples is a huge step for the Catholic Church. It changes nothing doctrinally, of course, in the Catholic Church, but it also changes everything.

It does not establish any official church ethical doctrine, but the suggestion that the human dignity of gay and lesbian loving couples is in need of legal protection is a momentous enhancement of their support and should be heeded by the U.S. Catholic Bishops. . . .

We have argued elsewhere that Pope Francis' "new pastoral methods," which suggest that "different communities will have to devise more practical and effective initiatives that respect both the Church's teaching and local problems and needs" (*AL*, n. 199), have opened the door for the organic development of doctrine.

In one sense, his support for the legalization of same-sex civil unions puts him at odds with the official sexual doctrine of the Catholic Church, which teaches that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered" and "under no circumstances can they be approved." (*Catechism*, n. 2357; *Persona Humana*, 8).



Michael Lawler and Todd Salzman

In another sense, however, it clearly reflects the social doctrine of the Catholic Church that promotes human dignity, opposes all discrimination, and teaches that homosexual people "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity" (*Catechism*, n. 2358).

Pope Francis neither accepts nor promotes the sacramental marriage of same-sex couples in the Church. He does, however, recognize and promote legal protections for human dignity in both civil and church law.

His new pastoral statement defending same-sex civil unions should be read as an attempt to balance those two realities in a way that promotes human dignity, welcomes members of the LGBTQ community into the Church family, and treats them with "respect, compassion, and sensitivity."

His statement, which clearly promotes Catholic social teaching but just as clearly diverges from Catholic sexual teaching, has brought joy and hope to homosexual individuals and couples, to their families, and to their friends, but it

will also bring condemnation and renewed vitriol from those long opposed to Pope Francis and his new pastoral methods. They prioritize Catholic sexual teaching and its absolute norms above Catholic social teaching and its promotion of human dignity and the common good.

Among these are the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops as a body and many individual American bishops who persistently lobby against "non-discrimination" legislation which will allow them to discriminate legally against homosexual persons.

Pope Francis' concern for the "legal protection" of same-sex couples highlights three very important points that the USCCB and many U.S. bishops continue to ignore.

First, it highlights a clear distinction between civil law and Church law. Claron cries from the USCCB for "religious freedom" often ignore this distinction and seek to impose Catholic doctrine on civic society.

The Bishops have a right to argue for Church doctrine in the civic realm, but they do not have a right to impose that doctrine in terms of civic law.

In addition, if the civic realm rejects its arguments, as it did in the USCCB's *amicus curiae* brief on the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court case *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which ruled in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage, it is not a violation of religious liberty, as so many bishops

claim. Rather, it is the case that civic society, SCOTUS in this case, does not consider the USCCB's legal argument against same-sex marriage credible. Rather, it sees the law opposing such marriages as a violation of basic legal and human rights.

Second, Francis' call for legal protection recognizes that same-sex couples in specific and, one can rightly assume, LGBTQ people in general, are discriminated against at the very least or actually suffer violence, as is the case in many countries and is evidenced in several States that label crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity "hate crimes."

The USCCB as a body, and many individual bishops, have argued against "non-discrimination" legislation for sexual orientation and gender identity in employment and housing under the principle of not "unjust discrimination," which advocates for "just discrimination." Many bishops continue to fire Catholic school employees who they discover are in legal same-sex civil mar-

riages and prohibit Catholic adoption or fostering agencies, who receive state or federal funding, as in the pending SCOTUS case of *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, to allow same-sex couples to adopt or foster.

Third, the USCCB and many individual bishops continue to prioritize Catholic sexual teaching and its teaching against homosexual acts over and above Catholic social teaching and its prohibition against discrimination.

The suggestion that there can be "just discrimination" against homosexuals simply because they are homosexuals is a contradiction in terms, for discrimination against them on this basis is always unjust. . . .

That the USCCB would implicitly support discrimination against homosexuals simply because they are homosexual and might engage in prohibited sexual activity is a fundamental violation of their inviolable consciences, human rights, and dignity. Yet the USCCB uses the principle of not "unjust discrimination" to promote discrimination against homosexuals in legislation regulating marriage, adoption, and employment.

Catholic social teaching is indisputably clear that discrimination is immoral. The *Catechism* teaches that "The equality of men [and women] rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it: 'Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design' (n. 1935).

The *Catechism* does not include sexual orientation or gender identity in this list and the USCCB has vehemently resisted employment non-discrimination legislation on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, as is clear in its *amicus curiae* brief filed with SCOTUS in the case of *R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes Inc. v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*.

However, Pope Francis' statement sheds an entirely new light on this issue. His recognition of legal protections for same-sex civil unions makes an important distinction between civil law and Church doctrine, prioritizes Catholic social doctrine over sexual doctrine, recognizes that LGBTQ people are discriminated against and need legal protection, and calls the Church to practice respect, compassion, and hospitality towards all people, especially LGBTQ people.

To all these opponents of Pope Francis we point out the historically obvious: the Catholic Church has changed often in its long history and it can, and surely will, change again in the future.

Pope Francis has sought to change it by introducing empathy, compassion, and respect for the human dignity of LGBTQ individuals and couples into the twenty-first century church he pastors, demonstrating that he, at least, is listening to the great gospel command: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). ✚

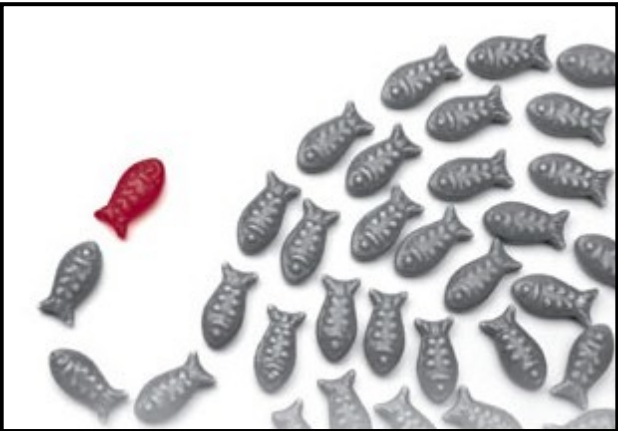


You Don't Qualify to Follow Christ? Good!

By Fran Rossi Szpylczyn  
Bondings 2.0  
NewWaysMinistry.org/blog  
January 24, 2021

“Come after me.” (Mark 1:17)  
With the door of my heart ajar, but not quite open, I reluctantly returned to church after a long absence. The door of my mind was also open, but barely a crack. Although a lover of God, I was skeptical of the institution. Despite my discomfort, I went along with returning pretty quickly, surprising myself as well as those around me. That was 30 years ago. Whenever I reflect on today’s Gospel, where the fishermen just leave their boats, I always think, what on earth would make anyone drop what they were doing and just go?  
In today’s first liturgical reading Jonah, so previously averse to following God that he found himself in the belly of a whale, finally agrees to God’s plan and begins his journey across Nineveh where in record time he converts the large city. The least expected person becomes the agent of change in God’s hands. In today’s gospel we see something similar. When Jesus approaches some unlikely fishermen, saying “Come after me,” they do so – just like that, no whale required. And like Jonah, the former fishermen end up transforming the world, as they have continued to do for succeeding generations.  
God seems to be fond of dubious characters to do God’s work. Typically it is never the high and mighty, but the lowly, the marginalized, or just the most

ordinary humans that God invites into the picture. Sometimes it is the most scandalous person that gets the call, like the Samaritan woman or Zacchaeus. God’s got an eye on all of us, persistently pursuing the most unexpected candidates!  
We are constantly surprised that



evidence of prior belief, or piety, or social status is not required. When the Lord wants our attention, little gets in the way other than our own intransigence. The primary requirement is willingness, even if it’s only marginal. God’s kingdom is not a closed club for the very best people, but a place where we are all transformed by love, service, and inclusion – if we follow.  
Yet, even for those who drop what they are doing to go, things can get in the way. Attempting to follow Jesus may lead you to find the door guarded by

someone who won’t let you in. Or they let you in only to attempt to shame and demean you because you do not fit in. This has happened to many LGBTQ Catholic seekers. Such gatekeeping was a stumbling block for me all those years ago when I returned. Although I am a cisgender, heterosexual woman, my life has always been full of people from across the spectrum, many of them gay. In fact, if not for some of my gay friends, I might never have found my way back to church – and I certainly would not have stayed. I can still hear the voice of a gay friend, urging me on, telling me to “trust God, go deeper into the Eucharist, and be a light for others. Maybe we will all be surprised at what we find!” If he could say this and stay, how could I not do the same?  
Jesus says, “Come after me.” It’s comprehensive. No one is left out. I cannot help but believe that all are welcome: the arrogant, humble, haughty, poor, self-righteous, saintly, educated, divorced, attractive, unchurched, well-connected, LGBTQ, and so many more. When called by Christ, we are asked to go – full stop. Jesus never pulls out a list of qualifications of eligibility for the initial “yes.” Perhaps God uses those who appear the most implausible as a powerful reminder that we are all the least likely. Societal or religious respectability is a veneer.

Of course Jesus also says to “repent and believe in the Gospel,” but why should we think that command is exclusively or even primarily about sex or sexuality? And isn’t there room for the fruits of the Spirit in our teachings about sexuality and marriage? We are all challenged to change. Whatever we show up with, we all need to ask what changes do we truly need to make? Hard hearts, rigid viewpoints, and cold rejection are not the fruit of repentance and belief in the Gospel.  
Respecting the dignity of all human persons is much deeper and requires an open heart. Do we want a church where only a certain few are worthy? A church where we compete to see who gets voted off the island? Or a church that gathers sinners – which we all are – and transforms one and all together in love?  
As someone who believes that our salvation is utterly dependent on everyone, I’m left dreaming of a bigger and more welcoming church. When Jesus says “Come after me” I say, grab your friends and loved ones to go with you. Demands for change will be thrust upon all of us—that’s God’s work. Our work is to follow Jesus, helping one another as we go. Christ, the ultimate fisherman, casts the widest net. Better it should strain from being overly full, than from a meager catch. The invitation is clear, following Christ will change us, but only if we say yes, and then let it happen – according to his will, not our own. ✚

Transgender persons are the body of Christ, too

By Luisa Derouen  
Global Sisters Report  
January 20, 2021

*Editor's note: Some names have been changed for privacy.*  
It was time for shift change, so the nurse going off was briefing her replacement. One of her patients was transgender, and she said to the nurse coming on duty, eyes rolling with a sarcastic tone, "It's one of those." Basically, that translates as "it says it's female, but we know it's really male. You're stuck with one of those freaks on your shift."  
Have you ever been called an *it*? Can you imagine what it would feel like for someone to be so rudely dismissive of your very humanity?  
Some transgender people know exactly what that feels like. My friend David is a registered nurse as well as transgender. He has been on the patient side and the staff side of how the humanity of transgender people is denigrated, denied and disrespected by medical providers. Increasingly, this issue is making its way to mainstream media and exposing the many challenges transgender people face seeking health care.  
Why should the medical experiences of transgender people and their families concern me? That is not my expertise at all. I'm a spiritual director. Well, here's why: we are each a unique body-soul creation of God.  
A favorite psalm verse for many people declares "You created my inmost self, and I am wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:13). This verse begs for affirmation as my heart breaks, hearing so many stories of transgender people whose precious body-selves are not revered when they seek medical care. For 21 years I have borne the weight of the cross with them when they are told by words and actions that their humanity is not wonderfully made; that who they are does not reflect the beauty of God's creation.  
Transgender people make incredibly

difficult decisions and take life-changing risks in order to honor their body-soul personhood. When they are not treated with respect when seeking medical care, their whole person is wounded and traumatized.  
Sometimes medical staff lack proper training. Vincent shared with me his experience trying to make an appointment at a Catholic hospital for an OB-GYN checkup. The nurse at the other end of the phone questioned, "I have to ask if you have had the surgeries? Do you still have your female parts down



there?" In horror he responded, "I'll discuss that with the doctor. I'm not comfortable discussing that with you over the phone." She insisted on an answer right then, which made him extremely uncomfortable, so he now shies away from any OB-GYN care entirely.  
A doctor shared a common experience. The doctor was called to the emergency department for a badly injured trans woman whose only option for care was this Catholic hospital. The name listed was the patient's legal male name, but the patient was presenting as female. She was clearly traumatized and crying. The young doctor reassured her and stated, "I'd like to take the best care of you I can. How do you prefer I address you?"  
The patient smiled, exhaled in relief, and stated her preferred name. A bit

more at ease now, she disclosed that she avoids medical care because she is treated so badly. The doctor was careful to include her preferred name on the chart alongside her male legal name. But the doctor learned later that the information included to respect the trans patient was removed by a more senior doctor because it was "unnecessary and just cluttering up the list." Now this woman was traumatized for her injuries, and again for being deliberately made invisible.  
Bishops who have spoken publicly have rightly insisted that transgender people must be treated with respect and compassion when they seek care at our medical facilities. But most make it very clear that people who identify as transgender are to be acknowledged by only their legal name and sex assigned at birth. Let me be clear: It is impossible to extend compassion and respect to people while at the same time insisting they do not exist. For this reason, transgender people avoid contact with medical personnel as much as possible, even to the extent of seriously compromising their health.  
Families as well as the transgender person are profoundly affected. Peggy is the mother of a transgender adult child. She is a university professor and has long been an ally of LGBTQ+ people, but hadn't personally known a transgender person before her own child shared that she was transgender. She struggled to understand, but believed what her child was saying and wanted to be supportive.  
In this fragile state Peggy met with their Catholic family doctor, whose medical competence they had relied on for years. She was eager to learn from him what to expect by way of possible medical interventions so she could be knowledgeable and supportive of what was in the best interest of her child. She was totally taken aback when "he flew into a rant against what he sneeringly referred to as 'transgender medicine', expressing outrage that such a field had been developed in recent years. He insisted the sci-

ence hadn't changed, though it clearly had. He declared that I should deny my child's experiences because they could not possibly be real. He said it's 'like a cult'.  
A very long list of reputable medical entities confirms that being transgender is an acknowledged reality and that transgender people have a right to appropriate medical care. It is not a cult or anything like a cult. Transgender people are not subscribing to any sort of “gender ideology,” which is a claim that a number of bishops have made.  
Sometimes, though rarely, a trans person has a positive experience with medical providers. As a high school junior in 2012, Michael attempted suicide and was brought to the psychiatric ward of a Catholic hospital. The doctors, nurses and staff called him Michael and validated his experience with support and acceptance. At his request a priest came to see him who, like the staff, listened nonjudgmentally and sensitively. Michael pointed out to me, "This experience was at a pivotal moment for me, and I am so grateful for everyone there. I've had harmful experiences, but this one stands out because it is so rare."  
Tragically, almost all transgender people have stories of traumatizing experiences with medical providers who refuse to believe that they are who they say they are, and whose health is significantly compromised as a result. This is especially tragic when it occurs in Catholic medical facilities.  
They are the precious body of Christ as truly as anyone. "The temple of God is holy, and you are that temple" (1 Corinthians 3:17). It has often been pointed out that we Catholics would never dream of disrespecting the body of Christ we receive in Communion, but we don't hesitate to disrespect the body of Christ in the person before us, especially those whose Christ-like humanity makes us uncomfortable. What a balm for many transgender people are the words of Cardinal Wilton Gregory. At a Theology on Tap session in August 2019, he responded to a transgender man by saying: "You belong to the heart of this church. There is nothing that you may do, may say, that will rip you from the heart of this church."  
Transgender people are the body of Christ too. ✚



## A place for us: on being gay in the priesthood

By **Jim McDermott**

NCRonline.org

January 26, 2021

For the last nine months, Greenwich Village's famous sing-along piano bar Marie's Crisis has been streaming five hours of live performance every night. Performers sing Broadway standards from their homes and rooftops while viewers send requests and hopefully tips.

I have been tuning in for a while now. There is nothing like a guy singing "Oklahoma" in his backyard while his nephew does cartwheels behind him to get your mind off the endless hellish weekend that has been 2020.

But I've found watching has offered me another kind of relief as well. For almost 30 years I've worked in the Catholic Church as a Jesuit seminarian and priest. It has been a tremendously rewarding life, filled with challenges to grow and inspiring people.

At the same time, being a gay man in an institution where the only real conversation around homosexuality frames it either as a sin to be faced or a secret that must be kept has had costs. Over time, you can begin to lose track of the fact that who you are is actually OK, or even that you exist. It's

like you learn to hold your breath so well, you forget you still need to breathe. Then you stumble onto a Facebook page where people are singing gender-swapped show tunes without shame. And suddenly you realize, *Wait, that's right. I'm here.*

To the extent that being gay existed for me as a concept back then, it was in the gaps that I created for myself — the people that I avoided, the movies I didn't watch, the choices I made that I carefully ignored. Like a villain in a film noir, day by day I retraced my steps, erasing any evidence of my own identity.

By the time I was applying to the Jesuits, I was more self-aware. Still, when the lead interviewer asked where I would put myself on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is straight and 10 is gay, I didn't know the answer.

But in the years that followed, with good classmates and a novice director who kept quoting me the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, I slowly started to settle into myself. The early part of my formation was like a 1980s romcom, lots of me banging into doorframes and stumbling over words as I finally began to see and feel the things that had been buried for so long.

I was very lucky to go through all

that in the Jesuits. My whole life in the order, in fact, I have been surrounded by friends and mentors of every orientation who have accepted me, laughed with (and occasionally at) me and shown me through their lives so much about being generous, human and happy. I have lived with hilarious gay men who delight in being themselves and being Jesuits, and others who have quietly endured great suffering because of who they are. When my 13-year-old sister died suddenly in a car accident shortly before I entered, Jesuits cared for me with a tenderness and vulnerability that remains a touchstone of what our life can be. . . .

Nobody tells you *Don't ever talk about being gay* when you're preparing to get ordained. You won't find it listed in any code of conduct or hear it mentioned at a ceremony. It's just understood, usually couched in benign-seeming virtues like "prudence," discretion" and "not wearing red while in Pamplona."

I didn't have any problem with that expectation. I didn't see how presenting silence as discretion can make the normal desire to share your own experience seem self-indulgent, or how calling it prudence can make you feel

like a vandal. I didn't notice the weight that hung quietly over the idea of being up front, the flashing ambers warning of the harm you might do not only to yourself but to the order that has cared for you and helped you.

No, I was just glad after 11 years of formation to be able to preside at sacraments and be a friend to people as a priest. Also, I could easily preach from my own understanding of self-acceptance and God's wide-open love for us all without having to wear a rainbow stole. And if I was going to mention queer people in a homily or article, it probably wasn't a bad idea to think about including other marginalized or mistreated groups as well. After all, the priesthood is not meant to be the pulpit for any individual priest's agenda or needs.

Make the best of what's allowed, try to be a place of welcome for others who feel rejected or outside the church, and go home each night to a community where you are known and can feel safe: That was my hope for the priesthood, and mostly that has been my life.

Over time, I even came to think of myself as "out," because most of the people who mattered to me knew who I was. I think many gay priests feel similarly. We're seen and known to the people we

care about. That's enough.

Hell, in many places, it's all that's possible. Even though our actual lives as gay priests are not terribly unusual, let alone controversial, the rhetoric that can get stirred up about homosexuality can be intense and frightening. If you're a 60-something gay man who loves God and has spent his whole life working for the church, you don't exactly have job prospects, should you be thrown out.

Even as I felt happy in my life as a Jesuit, at some point I started to notice changes in my behavior. I worried about liking too many posts from openly queer people; could that get me in trouble? At home, I found myself open with fewer guys, and when interacting with other queer people, I'd quickly excuse myself.

It wasn't that I was afraid of being associated with them, I realized. I was afraid of being *seen*.

I've witnessed the same in other priests at times, a cautiousness that seems to deepen as we get older. Some of that is not a function of sexuality per se, but aging and the church's more general struggles with affectivity. Many of us have been taught to treat our feelings like the high school baseball trophies you store in the attic — fine to dust them off and take a look at home from time to time, but otherwise it's probably best to keep them out of sight.

But affections kept secret are like the hidden planets that fascinated me as a kid; even when you can't see them, they warp the space around them. And so we clergy can become caustic where we're meant to be caring. We build walls when we're supposed to be vulnerable. We live in hiding, while we preach, "Be not afraid." . . .

As a gay priest, you tend to think of your silence as a required act of self-sacrifice. But in fact, our self-erasure also contributes to other people believing there is no place for them in the church or the world, just as we struggle at times to believe there is truly a place for us.

Our reticence to share our stories within the church or to speak out when queer people are fired or mistreated likewise cedes the church's narrative around homosexuality mostly to those who misunderstand or demonize us.

We dream of a church that will accept us. But realistically will our institution grow in its understanding of sexuality if we who have experience as both gay men and clergy won't stand with other queer people and other Christian churches and share what God has shown us, that while we would love to not be afraid or

ashamed anymore, to not feel in danger or like a burden, we would never choose to not be who we are? That we experience our lives and sexualities as a tremendous gift?

What's to say that's not why God called gay men to the priesthood in the first place? Certainly he's called enough of us.

My image of God used to be Jesus the carpenter's shaggy son who wanders around in what looks like uncomfortably heavy garments — *What is that, bur-lap?* — offering a word of hope and welcome and staying faithful to his love for us even though it costs him everything.

But these days, I find myself thinking of God more as mystery. It's the experience of looking up into a night sky filled with stars and being overwhelmed by its infinite vastness. The first instinct is to run and hide from the awareness of how ridiculously small we are. But on the other side of that moment, there's such relief. We spend so much of our lives thinking everything revolves around us. To realize that's not the case is to be released from a terrible burden.

When it comes to sexuality, I think that some in our church and other churches get stuck in that initial moment of terror. Overwhelmed by the boundless wilderness that is the human heart, they grasp at ways to feel in control. And so they insist on definitions that don't match lived experience, scientific study or the example of Jesus. They silence, they scapegoat, they condemn.

These are not the acts of individuals trying to embody the endlessly welcoming love of God, or even just trying to be a source of goodness in the world.

They're the choices of people who find themselves out of their depth, angry and afraid.

I understand that sense of being overwhelmed and scared. Many queer people do.

But the church doesn't have to stay in that place of fear, as Pope Francis himself has recently

demonstrated with his comments in support of civil unions.

For those willing to pause and sit a moment before the wondrous, silly, painful, spiritual mystery that is being human, I can tell you, there's a guy online in the Village who has a song for you. It's only a show tune, I know. But you'd be surprised how much just that can help you start to breathe. ✦

*Jesuit Fr. Jim McDermott is a screen and magazine writer in Los Angeles.*



Father Jim McDermott, SJ

**Nobody tells you *Don't ever talk about being gay* when you're preparing to get ordained. You won't find it listed in any code of conduct or hear it mentioned at a ceremony. It's just understood.**

## Catholic bishops sign statement to LGBT youth: 'God created you, God loves you.'

(Continued from page 1)

"I have heard from other L.G.B.T. Catholics that what other students experienced as the best years of their lives were often traumatizing experiences for them as they experienced social rejection and concerns about God's love for them and whether they had any hope of salvation. Too often these students have felt isolated, sometimes even afraid to get support from parents and family."

Last year, Bishop Stowe and Archbishop Wester appeared in a video offering support to the L.G.B.T. community. They had been scheduled to attend a conference about pastoral care and L.G.B.T. people, organized by James Martin, S.J., that was rescheduled because of the pandemic. (Father Martin, an editor-at-large at **America**, assisted the Tyler Clementi Foundation in contacting bishops who might be interested in signing the statement.)

Other bishops who also signed the statement have previously expressed support for L.G.B.T. Catholics, including Cardinal Tobin. In 2017, he spoke to a group of about 100 L.G.B.T. Catho-

lics who gathered at Newark's Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart, and in 2019, he told NBC News that he found the church's language around homosexuality to be "very unfortunate" and "hurtful."

Bishop Robert McElroy, who heads the Diocese of San Diego, also signed the statement. In 2016, he supported the idea that the church should apologize to L.G.B.T. people for historic mistreatment and calling for church teaching on the topic to use "language that is inclusive, embracing [and] pastoral."

Bishop Steven Biegler of Cheyenne and Bishop Bishop Edward Weisenberger of Tucson, as well as two retired auxiliary bishops, Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit and Bishop Dennis J. Madden of Baltimore, also signed the statement.

The Tyler Clementi Foundation is named for the Rutgers University student who died by suicide in 2010 following an act of online bullying. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are bullied and attempt suicide at higher

rates than their heterosexual peers. Trans students report higher rates of bullying, suicidal ideation and attempts at suicide than non-transgender students. The C.D.C. says schools can help combat suicide by encouraging respect for students and working to reduce bullying and harassment.

Jane Clementi, Tyler's mother and the co-founder of the foundation, told **America** the foundation seeks affirmative statements from religious leaders to L.G.B.T. youth because she has "seen firsthand how important it is to have positive messages in religious communities to influence people."

"I hope that a young L.G.B.T. person will read this statement and feel supported, know they are not alone and know that there are members of their faith community that support them," Ms. Clementi said, adding that she hopes the parents of L.G.B.T. children will not feel isolated if they belong to faith traditions that historically do not support L.G.B.T. people.

This is not the first faith outreach effort by the Tyler Clementi Founda-

tion. It is organizing a campaign aimed at leaders in the Southern Baptist tradition and has tried to combat faith-based conversion therapy programs. On its website, the foundation says, "Treating LGBTQ people as less valued, preaching at LGBTQ people, and calling LGBTQ people's sexual orientation or gender identity 'sinful' are all potential examples of religion-based bullying."

There are about 430 bishops in the United States, and with just eight signing onto the statement, Ms. Clementi, who was raised Catholic and who today attends a Protestant church, said she hopes others will sign on as well.

"We're trying to start a conversation," she said, noting that the statement "does not go against any Catholic teaching, which I have come to know as being a message of love, mercy and inclusion."

"That is so important for the church to shine to the world," she added. ✦