



March 24, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Truth & Love moves pastoral formation conference online in response to COVID-19 pandemic

(Trumbull, Conn.) Truth & Love's upcoming conference on the pastoral care of people who experience same-sex attractions (SSA) and gender dysphoria - "Be not afraid: Affirming the truth about sex and identity" - has been moved online, due to ongoing developments surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

The decision to move the conference online was made in response to health and safety concerns relating to the pandemic, and in adherence to guidelines which limit gatherings to no more than ten people.

"One bright spot in these difficult times is that, thanks to modern means of communications, not only are we able to move forward with our conference, but we can open it to those who may not otherwise have been able to attend," said Father Philip Bochanski, executive director of Courage International, the apostolate responsible for the Truth & Love initiative.

The conference, which will take place **April 27-29, 2020** over Zoom, is aimed at clergy, religious, and professionals who are seeking comprehensive formation on the topics of homosexuality and gender identity. It is especially geared towards those working in pastoral care, education, medicine, and the mental health profession.

"Although the current circumstances have altered our day-to-day lives, our responsibility to pastorally assist our brothers and sisters who experience SSA and gender dysphoria remains unchanged," said Father Bochanski.

"Like many others, people who experience SSA or questions about their gender identity are dealing with isolation, and being disconnected from whatever support system they may have. Now more than ever, they need both pastoral and practical care from those who can support them with knowledge and understanding," he added.

The theme for the conference was inspired by the words of Pope Saint John Paul II, who will be established as the official patron of the Truth & Love initiative in celebration of his 100th birthday.

John Paul II (born Karol Józef Wojtyła on May 18, 1920) served as the Roman Pontiff from 1978-2005, and is known for his extensive writings on sexual morality, particularly *Theology of the Body* and *Love and Responsibility*.

April's event will include several witness testimonies from men and women who experience SSA, as well as presentations from experts in the fields of pastoral care, psychology, theology, and medicine.

Courage member and public speaker, Avera Maria Santo, will provide one of several testimonials about her commitment to chastity with the experience of SSA.



Featured presenters also include George Mason University law professor, Helen Alvaré; licensed therapist, Suzanne Baars director of In His Image Counseling Center; and Trent Horn, author of *Made This Way: How to Prepare Kids to Face Today's Tough Moral Issues*.

This will be the fifth Truth & Love conference to-date, and the first to take place online. Prior conferences have been held in Detroit, Mich., Phoenix, Ariz., Bloomfield, Conn., and Rome, Italy.

Details about registration, as well as additional information and updates, can be found at the event page: <https://truthandlove.com/conference2020/>



NOTES FOR EDITORS:

Truth & Love is an initiative of *Courage International*, and focuses on providing sound formation to those who, in a pastoral or professional capacity, work with people who experience same-sex attractions and gender dysphoria.

Courage International, Inc. is an apostolate of the Catholic Church which offers support to persons experiencing SSA who have chosen to live a chaste life. It was founded by Fr. John Harvey, OSFS at the request of the late Cardinal Terence Cooke. The first Courage chapter meeting was held in New York City in 1980, and it was this initial group which developed the Five Goals of Courage: Chastity, prayer and dedication, fellowship, support, and good example. Fr. Harvey was succeeded as executive director by Fr. Paul Check, who held the position from 2008-2016. Fr. Check was then succeeded by Fr. Philip Bochanski in January, 2017. Today, Courage has more than 150 chapters in fourteen countries. Courage and EnCourage received canonical status in the Roman Catholic Church as a diocesan clerical public association of the faithful on November 28, 2016.

EnCourage is an apostolate of Courage International which provides support for families and friends of persons who identify as LGBT, and aims to teach them how to reach out to their loved ones with compassion and understanding. The group was first formed in 1987 by families in search of guidance for supporting their loved ones who experience SSA. In 1992, this group adopted the name EnCourage. Currently, they have more than seventy-five chapters in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Australia, Italy, Singapore, and the United Kingdom.

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