

Director's Corner - Rev. John F. Harvey, OSFS

Comments on

“Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination
Guidelines for Pastoral Care”

issued November 14, 2006

by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

This document of the United States Bishops is a significant improvement over Always Our Children (NCCB, October 1, 1997). It begins with an excellent presentation of the dogmatic teaching of the Catholic Church on human sexuality in general, and homogenital acts in particular. It states clearly that the homosexual inclination is objectively disordered, but not a sin. A person discovers the inclination within himself, and can learn not to give in to it. Having the inclination does not take away from the intrinsic dignity of the person. Often in the past persons with same-sex attractions would consider this teaching as making them essentially evil, but the Church sees the person as a whole with a particular deficit, which one can overcome, while leading a holy life. Sin enters the picture when one freely consents to the inclination. The Document rightly stresses the objective nature of Catholic teaching in contrast to the prevalent view that morality is a matter of feelings.

From my own experience in reading and writing in the field of homosexuality, I see the need to clarify the meaning of same-sex attractions as a disordered inclination. The bishops do say that it is an inclination but not a sin. It should be made clear that is in an inclination which is very different from other inclinations in that it is, in terms of nature, going in the wrong direction, and is found in no more than three percent of the human race. The inclination itself is disordered, since it is directed toward a sexual union which is intrinsically evil, whereas the heterosexual inclination is ordered to a sexual union which is intrinsically good, but capable of being used for evil through lust, anger, covetousness, and so forth. The sexual inclination in the vast majority of human beings is a strong attraction of a man to a woman and a woman to a man. This leads during the adolescent period to a desire to relate closely and intimately to a person of the other sex, with the hope of eventually making a permanent commitment to that other person that is to say, marriage. From marriage comes that satisfaction of a true two-in-one-flesh relationship with the hope of children. And children complete the family and the generation of the human race. Therefore, this inclination to persons of one's own sex should not be encouraged. It should not be compared with other inclinations except by way of contrast. This inclination is unnatural in its very roots.

The section on "Therapy for Homosexual Inclinations" is far too brief. Dr. Richard Fitzgibbons says that therapy for same-sex attractions makes use of many new insights. Fitzgibbons will present a complete critique of the psychological aspects of the Document. A great deal of research of the etiology of the homosexual condition has provided both psychology and theology with many new insights into the origins of the homosexual condition. One may say that the origins of same-sex attractions is

now largely explained.[i] To be sure, the research of NARTH (National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality) has given many of us, pastoral theologians and therapists, hope that persons with same-sex attractions (SSA) who seek both individual and group psychotherapy in a spirit of prayer will be able to reduce the power of same-sex attractions, or eliminate them.

The section on training in virtue is well done. In my 26 years working with Courage I have taught the ways of strengthening the virtue of chastity, not in a didactic manner, but through the interchange among the members themselves as they work the Twelve Steps of A.A. adapted to the homosexual condition.

In the section on Virtue the bishops wisely point out that one does not rely solely upon one's own powers to train one's desires to accord with God's will, but also upon prayer and the inspiration that comes from the Holy Spirit. In footnote 20 of the Document, taken from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) no. 2339, we find a very illuminating comment: "Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self mastery, which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy." How true!

The quote from The Splendor of Truth of John Paul II, quoted in the Document, says that it is a very serious error to conclude that the Church's teaching is only an ideal; in truth, our Redeemer has set our freedom free from the domination of concupiscence. [ii]

The section "The Necessity of Friendship and Community" stresses that friendship and community are ordered to each other, as members of Courage and Encourage will gladly reaffirm. There is no conflict between chastity and friendship. Courage encourages friendships among its members as well as with other people. At every annual convention members meet with friends from other parts of the nation as well as foreign countries.

The section on "Holiness" is very good. Personally, I have witnessed great advance in virtue by both men and women in Courage and Encourage.

The "Pastoral Obstacles" section makes several points. There the bishops reaffirm the teaching of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons, (October, 1986) that pastoral care which departs from the authentic teaching of the Church is neither caring nor pastoral. It also points out that the Church cannot support organizations or individuals whose work contradicts, is ambiguous about, or neglects her teaching on sexuality. This is taken from the above Letter, which stresses the scandal that ensues when false, misleading teaching is presented as Catholic doctrine. The Document does not specify any such organization, but in a forthcoming book, The Catholic Church and Homosexuality (Ascension Press, 2007), I explain how both Dignity and New Ways Ministry contradict Catholic teaching.

In their analysis of "Obstacles", as earlier in the Document, the authors keep referring to homosexual persons as victims of violence from heterosexual persons. But from my reading and pastoral experience I believe that the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. Anne Henderschott ([The Politics of Deviance](#), San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002], 93-108) describes in detail how an influential book by Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen ([After the Ball: How America Will Conquer its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the Nineties](#)) succeeded in changing the attitude of Americans toward persons with SSA over the last fifteen years.

It is difficult to convince Catholics that homosexual activity is always seriously immoral. In my contacts with parents and relatives of persons with SSA, particularly college students, I find some insisting that there is nothing wrong with homosexual persons desiring to form same-sex physical unions. It is said that this will help them in their loneliness. Very probably, they say, they were born that way. "The two men in the apartment next to us are so kind." On many college campuses young women believe it to be "cool" to be bisexual, without a clue to what it is all about. In short, this current phenomenon has become part of the problem.

The Document is on target, however, in its analysis of moral relativism, leading many to deny an objective basis for moral judgments; recognizing no act as intrinsically evil, that is to say, evil by its very nature. What makes it even more difficult to present as Catholic teaching is the claim by gay advocates that persons with SSA have an absolute right to homosexual acts, which means they are above the natural moral law. At the end of the section of pastoral care nothing is said about gay groups who harass organizations who hold fast to the teachings of the Church, such as Courage and Encourage. I have seen it happen on more than one occasion, even on a Catholic University campus.

The bishops make the point that it is not unjust to oppose so-called gay marriage, which would continue the devaluation of marriage, and the further breakdown of family life. Another obstacle to the reception of Catholic teaching is both hedonism and consumerism in our culture. This leads to viewing sexual relations as just another form of pleasure. Chastity is seen as incomprehensible, if not impossible. The advertising and entertainment industries are also instruments of the seduction of the innocent. In short, the world concentrates on the goods of this world as if there is nothing else beyond this life.

The difficulty that I have with the section "Guidelines for Pastoral Care" and the section on Catechesis is that they reveal that the authors lack experience in dealing with men and women with same-sex attractions. Most members of Courage, for example, go to their local churches, but are not known by the parish priests as having SSA. Some do not wish to be known as having SSA. Some do, however, participate in parish activities. One became a permanent deacon. It is true that when a bishop comes to a special session of Courage to say Mass the members are thrilled. But in this situation it is the leader or local director who seeks out the bishop. From the beginning of Courage the members ask of the other members two things: confi-

dentiality and anonymity. Members of Courage tend to avoid pastors who are known to dissent from Church teaching. Courage has had friendly relationships with many pastors in New York City, and with many bishops throughout the country. Courage is grateful for the continued financial support received from our bishops and for its recognition by the November conference.

The Document brings up the question whether persons with same-sex tendencies should tell others. I believe that a person should choose a trusted friend, or two, and stop there. They may also wish to disclose their situation to a priest, or therapist. I have cautioned Courage members to follow this advice. Already, as a member of Courage, one has the protection of confidentiality and anonymity within the group. With regard to family some Courage members choose not to reveal their SSA to siblings or even to parents for reasons of prudence.

With regard to "Catechesis", the section is applicable to a class of adult persons with same-sex attractions. With this group the teacher should be welcoming and challenging, teaching the truth with love. True, catechesis should begin in the family where parents are the first teachers. If the parents come to realize that a child behaves in a way that may indicate the beginning of same-sex attractions, it is advisable to consult with a child therapist, or with the Courage Central Office. Then the parents can give their child appropriate guidance.

The Document suggests that persons with SSA need special formation, and I agree. It would be similar to the work of Courage in forming leaders of our groups. Besides knowledge of Catholic teaching one needs background in the emotional problems frequently found in persons with SSA. It is highly recommended that the diocese be selective in choosing persons to give such formation, or to be leaders of Courage. Because of the shortage of priests many lay persons with preparation in theology and psychology are doing a splendid work leading Courage groups.

In practical pastoral practice the suggestions of this section can be applied only to a group of persons with SSA such as are found at a Courage meeting. It is unlikely that one would find such a group in an ordinary parish. If one found such a group of adults willing to be catechized in Church teaching, it would not be necessary to denounce violent behaviors, or to correct misinformation "that can lead to these behaviors". Give them the fullness of Catholic teaching so they can learn to live a chaste life.

Most of the section on "Sacraments and Worship" applies to both heterosexual and homosexual persons for example, the reception of the Holy Eucharist and of Penance, and the development of an intensive prayer life. The Document makes it clear that the Church does not support so-called gay marriages, or any semblance thereof, including civil unions that give the appearance of marriage. It states that the Church does not support the adoption of children by same-sex couples. It does not elaborate on the damage done to a child in such a situation. The Church, however, does not refuse the Sacrament of Baptism to such children, but it insists on a well founded hope that condi-

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the child will receive instruction in the Catholic religion. This condition of well founded hope will be difficult to achieve because people in same-sex unions, generally speaking, do not agree with Catholic teaching.

The A Pastoral Support section is very well done. It recommends spiritual support groups for persons who are struggling with SSA, and in the footnote refers to Courage and Encourage as support systems whose principles are in accord with the teaching of the Church. It encourages persons with SSA not to define themselves primarily in terms of their sexual inclinations, or to participate in gay subcultures. I would add that such persons define themselves as creatures of God with intelligence, free will, and the power under God's grace to overcome lust and other evil desires; when baptized into the Church they become brothers and sisters of Christ. Courage agrees with the bishops that members of Courage and like communities should form relationships with a wider community.

The section on pastoral and psychological care for adolescents is very well done. The Document also refers approvingly to support groups of families who have children, spouses, or other relatives with same-sex attractions. That is what Encourage is all about.

[i] Cf. CCC, no. 2337.

[ii]Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis Splendor) (Washington, D.C., USCCB, 1993), no. 103.

Bulletin Board

Courage Comes Into Its Own!

At the November meeting of the NCCB on Monday, the 13th, Archbishop Raymond Burke of St. Louis, spoke on pastoral policies concerning homosexual persons-or persons with same sex attractions (ssa). He told how Courage began in 1980 at the request of Terence Cardinal Cooke and how Fr. John Harvey, OSFS was asked to lead the support for men and women with ssa. Later, he pointed out that parents of men and women in the lifestyle also sought spiritual direction for themselves, as well as their children. Archbishop Burke was followed by Frances Cardinal George and seven other bishops from the conference. All told they spoke about 30 minutes. It was a great day for Courage!

As An Added Note . . .

Fr. Harvey was interviewed by Zenit News (The world seen from Rome) for his response to the Bishop's document, Pastoral Care for Those With Same-Sex Attrac

tion. The interview can be found on the Zenit web site (zenit.org) Code: ZE06120723, Date: 2006-12-07.

Dec. 2nd Day of Recollection!

The Courage/Encourage family came together on Saturday, December 2nd for an Advent Day of Recollection at St. John the Evangelist Church in Manhattan. It was a day of empowerment, prayer and fellowship filled by the Holy Spirit. Rev. Edward J. McMahon, SJ gave a very inspirational address and reminded us that we're ALL called to foster new life with the help of Christ. Fr. McMahon is new to the Courage ministry and is deeply moved by the dedication and desires to live chastely by the men and women of Courage. Also, John from NJ, delivered a powerful witness to the faith as a man in Christ and a member of Courage. Many thanks to Fr. McMahon and John . . . we honor you!

As we move into another new year, please think about coordinating a Day of Recollection for your local Courage and Encourage groups. It is a time of much needed fellowship, quiet prayer, reflection and . . . staying connected! You can contact the Courage Office in NYC for ideas on planning a Day of Recollection in your area.

The Journey to Incorporation!

The Steering Committee for Incorporation and the Courage Board of Advisors met on Tuesday, December 12th. Fr. Harvey was advised some time ago that it would be Courage's advantage to seek incorporation. One of the reasons for taking such a step is to ensure the existence of the Courage/Encourage ministry for many years to come. At this point, the Steering Committee (5 members from the Board of Advisors) has consulted legal counsel and will be filing the necessary documents with the State of NY. We're hoping this process will be finalized some time in the spring. Your prayers are much appreciated.

New Courage Groups!

We've been notified that new Courage chapters have started in the following cities: Merrick, New York; Rockford, Illinois; Harrisburg and Scranton, Pennsylvania, Cape May, New Jersey and in the near future Charleston, South Carolina and a second group in Philadelphia. Please keep these new groups in your prayers.

Also, a new Courage Reparation group has been formed in the Philippines. Our Blessed Mother continues to reach far and wide to foster new life and help us to KNOW Jesus through our joys and sufferings!

On a Sad Note . . .

Our condolences to Tina Nair on the death of her father, Peter Nair; he died on Saturday, December 2nd. Tina has worked with Fr. Harvey in the Courage ministry for over ten years (right hand woman) and continues to do so on a part-time basis. Many of the Courage members in the NYC metropolitan area first heard of this news while attending the Courage Day of Recollection. We stopped and lifted him up in prayer and remembered Peter at mass that day. Fr. Harvey had the privilege of visiting with Tina, Peter and the family in Toronto shortly before his death. On December 9th, Fr. Harvey traveled again to Toronto and celebrated a mass with the Nair family and friends.

Tina and her family has asked those wishing to express their condolences to send a donation to Courage in memory of her Dad.

Donations to Courage!

Thank you so much for all the generous contributions sent to Courage this past year. We ask for your continuing support in the new year. If you can, please contribute by sending a tax-deductible gift, payable to Courage, to the Courage Central Office address on this newsletter or by logging on to the Courage web site at www.couragerc.net and utilize the PayPal feature to make a one-time gift or set-up a monthly recurring donation.

New Book by Fr. Harvey – Update!

Fr. Harvey's upcoming book [Homosexuality and the Catholic Church: Clear Answers to 100 Challenging Questions](#), will be published by Ascension Press. The release date set for January 2007 has been pushed out to March 2007. We will advertise its availability in future newsletters and on our web site Couragerc.net!

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May the Infant Jesus bless all the readers of our Courage Newsletter, as well as all the members of Courage and Encourage with special Christmas graces, strengthening your hearts in the circumstances of daily life.

Fr. John Harvey, OSFS