



Fortunate Families Newsletter

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Catholic Families Advocating Respect and Justice for their Gay & Lesbian Children

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Words to ponder

Hope is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.

-- Czech playwright and politician Vaclav Havel

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About this issue

By Casey Lopata

This issue is devoted to responses to the US Bishops document: "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care."

First are excerpts from letters to bishops expressing concerns about the proposed guidelines. The letters didn't stop the document's approval, but hearts were surely touched, building the foundation for a more pastoral future response. Only the first letter is signed because the writer wanted it to be public. Permission to use other names was not sought so they are not used.

Then, following a reprint of the message Fortunate Families sent to email readers (so hard copy readers can read it and respond if they wish), are excerpts from responses to that message.

Following that is the statement from the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries (NACDLGM).

Finally, a calendar item of note, and our thanks.



Courtesy of Signe Wilkinson, Philadelphia Daily News, Washington Post Writers Group

Dear Bishop.... Letters--edited

Sent to bishops re the proposed guidelines before approval.



I am a Lesbian woman, made so by God, to love and serve. I experience that call everyday in a myriad of ways. Today, I know the Spirit is asking me to share with you. I do so humbly and with a sense that you will not be entirely open to my perspective. I only ask that the power of God continue to be unleashed in me and in you.

I read your press release with a sinking heart. The phrases "homosexual inclination", "moral disorder", "always sinful", have no resonance in my spiritual journey. As you do, I walk in the constant need for conversion, but not from who I am.

Today's Gospel relates the story of Jesus calling the spiritual leaders of His day to task for holding on to law that disregarded the needs of a person. He asked, Who, if a relative fell in a cistern, would not rescue that person...even on the Sabbath? I'm sure, from your point of view, you believe you are trying to "rescue" me and my LGBT sisters and brothers from eternal condemnation. Frankly, it is not God with Whom I am concerned; it is the prejudice, self-loathing and the internal/external violence that such stands, as exists in this document, perpetuate. What Jesus taught me today was that I have to be all ears, eyes and heart to see the Spirit revealed in ways I don't expect; in ways that call

me beyond my narrow views of orthodoxy and tradition. There seems to me to be a parallel here. Despite the accumulated understandings of psychology, theology, etc., this document clings to an uninformed, dangerous point of view.

There is an African proverb, “When you stand with the blessings of your mother and God, it matters not who stands against you”. I stand before you today, experiencing our Mother-God’s blessings. Perhaps, if you could see through my Mother’s eyes, you would reconsider how you will extend your heart and hands to the LGBT community.

Peace, Dorothy Calvani

I am the father of six children whom I raised Catholic to the best of my ability and graces that God saw fit to bestow on me and my wife. We were both products of 16 years of formal Catholic academics. Unsurprisingly this background produced a family well grounded in Catholic tradition and belief. My wife and I applied our strong convictions with firm certitude and a loving discipline. We knew the rules and we knew the reasons.

During my children’s teen years we developed a tradition of holding family conversations after dinner. Unfortunately, when the subject of homosexuality was broached, I acted upon my well-inculcated self-image of father/teacher, and confidently pontificated Church teaching, concluding with a brief lecture on the virtue of chastity. End of conversation.

But an unsuspected silent tragedy was unfolding during that time. One of the recipients of my certitude was hearing an unintended demeaning of his very

being. I didn’t know my only son was gay. He was hearing his father tell him that God made him defective. His was a condition to be deplored. At best, he was second class—at worst, an abomination. He heard only that he was unnatural.

It was not surprising then, that my son went far away to college, and in his freshmen year one Saturday, sat down and wrote a poetic note of despair, swallowed a full bottle of prescription pain killers, and laid down to die. Suicide was better than revealing to his beloved family who he really was.

I now know suicide is a plague for young homosexual persons. The suicide rate is three times that of their heterosexual counterparts. Having now had more than 30 years to contemplate my role in this tragedy, I have realized the errors of my past.

I lived through WWII. I clearly recall the terrible consequences stemming from the errors and human failings of that time. It was then, and seems now, endemic to the educated elite. It has consistently afflicted humanity throughout history. It was certainly blatant during WWII.



The Nuremberg trials exposed this phenomenon clearly. It revealed, in the Nazi belief system, an unquestioning loyalty to the leadership among the well educated. Independent thought was suppressed, often in a brutal fashion. Obedience to the leader was respected as the only acceptable conduct. Empathy was anathema to the Nazi regime.

The first victims of the Nazi atrocities were the homosexuals of that day. They were rounded up, branded with a pink triangle, and executed -

some 15,000. Homosexual persons were despicable entities (disordered?) in polite circles. Nobody would object to denigration of that minority. It’s not too different today.


The ensuing trials at Nuremberg decided that we are responsible for the consequences of our inaction or failure to oppose injustice. The Nazis who were hanged or imprisoned received severe retribution because they had refused to act righteously, as humane individuals, counter to their leaders. In the end, they could not hide behind loyalty to an unjust leadership. They could not defend a decision to forgo independent thought and actionand, “They had no empathy.”

I have been guilty of this same phenomenon. I unwittingly led my son toward suicide. I was obeying Church leaders—doing as I had been taught. God knows my intentions were “good.” But the result was not. I was doing as I had been taught, but I had no empathy. I feared and avoided independent thought and action.

The proposed guidelines are a parallel kind of incident. The intention to emphasize Church doctrine on homosexuality may be born of a righteous conviction, couched with soothing language, and an intended compassion, but what will the result be? How many obscure young gay persons throughout our nation will hear the same denigrating message my son heard? How many more young people will ditch their Catholic upbringing and enter a spiritual desert? There most certainly will be many more than the Bishops seem to realize. We teach them to be silent. We teach them self hate. Woe to us!

When our eternal Nuremberg comes I pray that you and I will

find greater mercy than the Nazi defendants experienced.

I am a life-long Catholic, the mother of three children, the youngest of whom is a gay son. I am writing to express my great dismay. My hope is that my words might touch your heart. 

Despite some welcome and supportive rhetoric in parts of the document, it contains ideas and language which will undoubtedly confirm the demeaning of gay persons in their own eyes and in the eyes of others.

First, my son John does not have homosexual “tendencies” or a homosexual “inclination.” His homosexuality is a deep seated and very genuine part of his humanity. It is an aspect of his personhood which makes him who he is, not ALL, but a very important part of his “John-ness.”

He is looked upon in some circles as not only different from the heterosexual norm, but even “disordered.” This term, despite the attempts to soften its impact, nevertheless sows seeds of shame and self-denigration.

If John’s homosexuality is an integral part of his being, how can he become a fully alive human by fulfilling the role God has seen fit to give him if he cannot, according to Church teaching, experience the physical, psychological, and spiritual expression of his sexuality?

I question the pompous and superior attitude which allows the Church to claim to know the mind of God regarding sexuality. Is there nothing left for us to learn about God?

I do hope the Church will give consideration to recent scientific information about the nature of homosexuality. That might pave

the way for a more realistic attitude toward my son and his place in the Church.

I know many, many homosexual persons raised as Catholics who no longer set foot in a Catholic Church because they have been so disparaged by the language used to describe them. What a loss of gifts to our Church and to the wider community!


I cannot remain silent about my objections to how my son is treated by the Church that I love.

As parents of a gay son, we want to express our very deep concerns.

We understand the faithful most affected by this document were not consulted. Such an approach seems deficient, at best.

In the title and multiple text references, homosexuality is defined as an “inclination” or “tendency.” Are the bishops implying constitutional homosexuality is no longer considered a sexual orientation, no longer a “deep-seated dimension of one’s personality”? Somehow a voluntary tendency, “fixable” and no longer a “given.”? Why is the clarity of “orientation,” in previous pastoral messages, now discarded?

We fear many Catholics will find in these terms hierarchical support, if not encouragement, to see homosexuality as a deviation from heterosexuality—and to refute [its] permanent and unchangeable nature. We fear this document, if homosexuality is not clearly described in the understanding light of “Always Our Children,” will grievously affect the pastoral care of homosexual persons and their families.

Our experience speaks of a son who never missed weekend mass, and 

was active in Catholic activities. He no longer feels welcome. We can assure you this reality is a threat to family life—and a peril to its members’ faith.

We fear this document—with the treatment it offers on “homosexual inclination and tendency,” the repugnant implication that retro-therapy may somehow hold value, the destructive suggestion that one hold his or her orientation restrictively private, the persistent call of “intrinsically disordered” will simply alienate further the people we are trying to help.

Help transform the Institutional Church and society. Demonstrate that we are all equal in God’s eyes whether we are Jew, Greek, Samaritan, women, men, red haired, left-handed, or homosexual. How far will the anti-homosexual behavior have to go before a letter like *Nostra Aetate* for homosexuals is published? How long did the Vatican wait to state that the sun does not circle around the earth despite scientific information that showed the opposite?

We are Roman Catholic parents of a daughter who is gay, who is very charitable and who is not accepted by the church in which she was raised because she has a committed relationship to another very kind and charitable woman. Please let our church be a place of comfort and acceptance for our children who happen to be gay. God created them as people who are gay. We may not understand God’s plan, but we should not set up barriers that are immoral.

1. Put yourself in the shoes of a person who is gay; do you really believe the document



welcomes Catholics who are homosexuals?

2. A basic characteristic of being human is a desire to love and be loved, to have a family relationship in which a person can share their life with another. Isn't it inhuman to expect people who are gay to be forced to be celibate and then chastise and shun them if they are not celibate? Is it appropriate they are considered sinners and kept from receiving the sacraments?

Although the document does have praiseworthy elements, it is at its core an extremely flawed presentation [in] its unrealistic approach to pastoral care. I offer for your consideration only two egregious examples.

First, the very title, with its misleading terminology of "homosexual inclination," indicates the basic lack of comprehension of its authors. To characterize a person's fundamental homosexual makeup *repeatedly* as a mere "inclination" (used about 50 times) or just "tendencies" shows an unacceptable ignorance of scientific information regarding human sexuality and an obvious lack of consultation with Catholics in the lesbian/gay community.

Secondly, perhaps due to its origin within the Committee on Doctrine (instead of the Committee on Pastoral Practices), the guidelines *stress* and *reiterate* the Church's already *well-known* and *long-held* condemnation of homogenital behavior, almost as though nothing else really matters in the lives of gay/lesbian individuals. The Catholic News Service reports: "Despite the title, only about one-fifth of the document is devoted specifically to pastoral care guidelines; the *larger*

and more important part of the text [my emphasis] is devoted to the framework of Church teaching."

The document neglects to *emphasize* other *less-known* aspects of Church teaching, such as truly positive support of lesbian/gay people in the face of phobic discrimination. Rather, the guidelines in effect reduce homosexual identity to homosexual activity and thereby ignore real homosexual needs, such as sensitive affirmation of same-sex feelings as an integral component in personal makeup.

As a parent I have a lived experience, as do many other parents, and those experiences and stories would be invaluable in a guidance document. Our lesbian daughter is no different than her heterosexual brothers and sisters. Her sexual orientation is but a small part of her 'whole person'—she is a good, caring, and respectful individual who lives her life in a Christian manner as well as anyone I know.

In my work with hundreds of parents, I have found Catholic parents as likely to be angry with the Church, as concerned that their child is lesbian or gay. That anger arises from negative language used in church documents, e.g.: "Objectively disordered" and "Intrinsically evil". Although these are theological terms, not intended to apply to the individual person, the fact is that they are read and interpreted that way.



The excessive focus on, and demonizing of, homosexual acts has the effect of overriding all other positive, pastoral messages, and leads to discouragement, lack of respect for, and even abandonment of the Church by

lesbian and gay Catholics and their parents. Despite admonitions to 'respect' homosexuals, and that violence of any kind is wrong, this 'name calling' validates verbal, emotional, and even physical violence by some—even "good Catholics".

These guidelines have positive aspects, but the negative and misleading language overshadows them, e.g.: calling homosexuality an 'inclination' which implies a choice or desire, rather than what it really is, the 'sexual orientation' created by God.

As your Diocesan Ministry to Lesbian and Gay Catholics and their Families, we want to share our concerns.

- The pastoral letter, *Always Our Children* (AOC), has been a foundational document given to us by the Bishops, a great help in our ministry. This new proposal for pastoral guidelines does not refer to any of the positive aspects of *Always Our Children*. Catholic homosexual persons, their parents and families, and those who minister with them have found *Always Our Children* encouraging and welcoming, but will find these guidelines to be negative and lacking in understanding of the lives of homosexual persons.

- The document begins with: "In response to questions raised about the suitability of some ministries to persons with a homosexual inclination..." We aren't aware of any concerns with our ministry or any other successful ministry functioning throughout the US with the approval of their Bishop or pastor.

- To our knowledge, most, if not all, of the key people in ministry to Lesbian and Gay Catholics and their families were not asked to participate in the preparation of

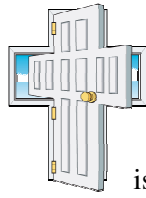
this document. Fr. Jim Schexnayder, nationally known for his ministry work and a participant in the writing of *Always Our Children*, was not consulted, nor was the organization he founded, the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries (NACDLGM). There is no reference to parents of Lesbian and Gay children being involved. Because of this, the document is missing a wealth of insight and experiences.

- The change in language from "homosexual orientation" in AOC, to "homosexual inclination" loses the understanding of "...sexual orientation (heterosexual or homosexual) as a deep seated dimension of one's personality and to recognize its relative stability in a person." This semantic regression will only cause pain and misunderstanding, and undo years of successful ministry and return of many Lesbian and Gay Catholics to the Church.

- Most homosexual persons, including Catholics, are not uncomfortable with their sexual orientation, but with the attitudes that reduce them to stereotypes regarding lifestyle. Catholic homosexual persons are people of faith, commitment, service and spirituality. Guidelines for an effective ministry must take note of the full person and their conscience.

I cannot understand how the bishops can come up with a document on ministry to gays and lesbians without consulting gays and lesbians, their families and those ministering to them. It strikes me as the height of arrogance. It puts me in mind of Jesus' lambasting the Pharisees who "Lay heavy burdens on

peoples' backs and do nothing to help them."



Telling homosexuals not to reveal their sexual orientation to any but a few close friends is beyond comprehension. One of our primary jobs is accepting the truth of who we are and embracing that truth. Yet here is the church telling people to stay in the closet. It goes against all we know of spiritual and psychological health.

And what is this: "It is important that church ministers listen to the experiences, needs and hopes of the persons with a homosexual inclination (shouldn't this say 'orientation'?) to whom and with whom they minister.?" Church ministers should engage in dialogue but not the bishops who are writing up these documents?

I wonder how many of our children and grandchildren will remain in the church. I have always told them to stay and fight from within for what they believe. I see them turning more and more against this church which tells them their two brothers are disordered, have no right to a loving relationship in their lives, that maybe God made a mistake in creating them as who they are. The sad part is our children and their spouses are spiritual people who have a lot to offer the church.

I feel very bad about how I feel towards the church and its bishops. I find myself having an attitude of "yeah, right!" What they say no longer bears weight with me. I find myself withholding money for Vatican causes; I've stopped contributing to my favorite charitable group, Catholic Relief Services, because of that fiasco with that priest who is openly gay.

How can so many of them [bishops] be so blind? Why aren't

more of them speaking up instead of just going along? Why is the church so hung up on sex? What does it take to get the bishops to listen... a mass exodus and then they will talk about "the faithful remnant?" How do we fight this in a constructive way?

We "look to the Church for a place where we might live in authentic human integrity and holiness of life". This sounds so good! But I don't see it happening.



I see no respect for baptised gay members. Is there any input in this document from "baptised gay members"? In my own parish, friends have been made to resign from their ministries and don't even feel welcome any longer.

If you begin by labeling them, the way God makes them, as having a homosexual "Inclination", which is "disordered" and must be fought, then nothing useful can follow. You are out of step with scientific insights into human nature and psychology.

Our gay son doesn't have an "inclination". He has been, at the core of his being, the person he is since he was a little boy. His faithful long-term relationship with his partner is as real a covenant as are any of his siblings' straight marriages. He and his partner of eleven years are in a legal civil union. They are a joy to us and their wider family.



The church has changed its views of other laws (usury and slavery spring to mind). The earth was never the centre of the universe. Neither is straight marriage or celibacy.

Please stop straining at gnats and swallowing camels. Write a

document on immoral and unjust war, and Iraq.

As a homosexual person, I urge you to consult with openly LGBT persons involved in ministry of all levels.

I urge you to not succumb to inaccurate and often false stereotypes, like those purporting the existence of a universally promiscuous and hedonistic lifestyle. Just as the media portray heterosexual persons in some despicable situations to make money or promote an agenda, so do homosexual persons suffer from a small but vocal group of people who openly proclaim hatred for any homosexual person, and wish to see others join in that dark agenda of misinformation.

I urge you to use consistent terms referring to homosexual persons—terms consistent with the catechism (homosexual condition) and/or terms consistent with scientific and medical understanding (homosexual orientation).

I urge you not to use terms that are purposefully demeaning and discriminatory, like “inclination” or “tendency”. These terms assume, often wrongly, that homosexual persons do not have informed consciences. They are derogatory and patronizing, especially in light of the struggle the homosexual person may have gone through to acquire a fully informed conscience.

I urge you to not fall victim to fear, to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and act as Jesus Christ demanded, with care and love deserving of all children of God.

Our being known as “gay friendly” has allowed us the privilege of being invited

inside the lives of our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender friends. We know the hurt many churches, the Catholic Church among them, have inflicted on this community and their families, by the language used and the implication of second class membership that is implied and extolled.

The nasty language from Catholic documents was highlighted by a concerned pastoral letter from 23 Chicago priests several years ago. Do these insights fall on deaf ears as you write a “Pastoral Care document?”

The faithful in the pews are really quite intelligent. They are not buying this insistence that gay people are evil or disordered. You, the Bishops, are facing difficulties over your handling of another sexual issue. Why go after this sexual issue when the tenor is so demeaning and bereft of insight and compassion. I believe this document will fall on deaf ears and will further erode the credibility of the Episcopacy in this country.

Gentlemen, to be blunt, I believe you are going to shoot yourself in the foot on this one.

One of our daughters is lesbian, in a long term, committed and loving relationship. They publicly pledged their fidelity to one another in a commitment ceremony. They are the parents of one son who is a fine young man of **heterosexual “inclination,”** now a college student. Our daughter is a counselor; her partner a registered nurse.



From the time our daughter was about 15-16 until she was about 25, she was suicidal. She was struggling with the painful emotions of being “different,” thinking she was mentally ill. She

was hospitalized on at least three occasions. Suicide among adolescents is a leading cause of death for this very reason. They are so afraid of the consequences of “coming out” to family and friends because of the built-in ridicule, harassment, hatred and discrimination, as well as the derogatory and insulting descriptions of who they are, posed by even the body of bishops.

Our daughter says that even when she was 7-8, she had feelings of being different from her sisters and other girls. When God created humankind in God’s own “image and likeness,” God saw that it was good. God could not and did not create persons who are



“gravely disordered” or “intrinsically evil.” Homosexual persons are whole in mind, body, and spirit. They are not defective or demented; they are just different. It was not until our daughter could come to terms with who she was, that God created her this way, that she was able to accept herself and be at peace. She is still angry at the church for the discrimination and rhetoric railed against her and has since, regrettably, found a home in a more welcoming Christian community.

We find it strange that any reference to persons of homosexual orientation is always reduced to sexual acts. They are sexual beings, but like their heterosexual counterparts, very little time is spent in actual genital activity. Have you asked a married couple how often they have intercourse? Gay and lesbian persons are productive members of society; they work at meaningful vocations, drive to their jobs, spend time eating and sleeping, shopping, doing household chores, watching TV, reading and

studying, engaging in sports and a myriad of other activities. Once in a while, they make love. **Their lives are not spent in bed!**

Regardless of what the “experts” say, there are no “former” homosexuals. Many gay and lesbian persons marry in an attempt to live as society expects; however, these marriages end in disaster. They cannot live a lie. Homosexuality is not a disease or a mental illness, so there is no need for a “cure.” Our lesbian daughter cannot change her sexual orientation anymore than our four heterosexual daughters can change theirs.

The document states that “the Church has a right to deny roles of service to those whose behavior violates her teaching.” What is the behavior in question? Will those who use artificial contraception also be denied roles of service? Will the priest or Eucharistic minister ask each person if they violated any church teaching?

Same sex couples are very capable of love in the purest sense of the word. They are no more promiscuous than heterosexual persons are. Many are in long term and committed relationships. Many still believe “Those who abide in love, abide in God and God in them.” It is not evident that the USCCB spends the same amount of time and energy addressing problems of heterosexual singles or married couples where one or both are engaged in swingers clubs, adultery, drugs, drinking, gambling, domestic abuse, and dereliction of family duties. These are the real issues that harm families, especially children. There are so many marriages in peril and families at risk, but not because of persons with a



homosexual orientation! Where is the document entitled “Guidelines for Ministry to Persons of Heterosexual Inclination with Aberrant Behaviors?”

Our daughter and her partner are loving parents and wonderful aunts, helpful and supportive to other members of their families. We feel blessed to have her as our daughter. Though it was a very difficult and painful time while she was finding out who she was, and there were times when we asked God to “take this cup away,” we now thank God for sending her to us. Her life is truly a gift!

Message to Fortunate Families readers

Sent Nov. 16, 2006 to those with email addresses

Dear Families and Friends,
It’s difficult to express our level of distress at the U.S. Bishops’ approval of “Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care.” You can read the approved document at:
[http://www.usccb.org/dpp/Ministry .pdf](http://www.usccb.org/dpp/Ministry.pdf)

Bishop Arthur J. Serratelli, Chair of the Committee on Doctrine that drafted the document, said the tone of the statement was intended to be “positive, pastoral and welcoming.” Yet the statement says, “the homosexual inclination is objectively disordered” and compares it to other disordered inclinations “such as those that lead to envy, malice, or greed.”

Serratelli admitted that the committee did not consult with gay men and lesbians. Nor, per our extensive contacts, did it consult with parents or pastoral ministers in this ministry. The result is a hurtful, harmful, and pastorally

hollow document that essentially says the Church welcomes only gay people if they are ashamed of their orientation and are willing to hide it, even if they are not sexually active—the same position the institutional Church holds relative to gay seminarians.

We are deeply concerned this document will:

1. Continue the spiritual and psychological abuse of our LGBT loved ones, their families, and those who minister with them.
2. Be used by Church ministers or parents to coerce people struggling with their sexual identity into ministries and therapy that will harm them and, if the person refuses, cause some families to be torn apart.
3. Be used as a license to impede or end ministries that do not adhere to the Courage approach, and divert the energies of such ministries to fending off attacks.
4. Be used to nullify the pastoral language of *Always Our Children*. This document, and its 45 footnotes, fails to even acknowledge the existence of *Always Our Children*.
5. Cause many more LGBT Catholics and their families to leave our Church in search of Christian communities where they are truly welcomed and their gifts affirmed.
6. Cause the Church to lose more credibility, and thus have its statements on war, poverty, and other social justice issues more easily dismissed.

We place these concerns in the care of our gracious and loving God as we pray for wisdom and for an appropriate personal response.

Knowing we *must* always follow our consciences, our

decision must be an intentional one. We suggest that to stay in this Church, one must do so in a way that does not enable the Church to spiritually abuse our LGBT loved ones. What might we do?

Do we throw up our hands and walk away?

Do we simply ignore the document as the work of uninformed and pastorally insensitive men who reduce pastoral care to obsession with sexual activity?

Do we speak our truth to church leaders, challenging them to see God's love revealed in our children, as they stated so clearly in *Always Our Children*?

Perhaps, we can actively respond as the document itself recommends. The document says: "it is important that Church ministers LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCES, NEEDS, AND HOPES of the persons with a homosexual inclination to whom and WITH whom they minister. Dialogue provides an exchange of information, and also communicates a respect for the innate dignity of other persons and a RESPECT FOR THEIR CONSCIENCES. 'Authentic dialogue, therefore, is aimed above all at the rebirth of individuals through interior conversion and repentance, but always with PROFUND RESPECT FOR CONSCIENCES and with patience and at the step-by-step pace indispensable for modern conditions.' [John Paul II] Such dialogue facilitates an ongoing, interior conversion for ALL parties truly engaged in the exchange." [Emphases are ours]

It's too bad the bishops didn't heed their own words while developing this document. Still, we can find out if the bishops

really mean they are serious about such dialogue. Here are some suggestions for what each of us might do:

- Talk to your pastor individually or with other concerned persons.
- Call your bishop and ask to meet with him, as individuals, couples, or a group – perhaps in a listening session.
- Plan a service for LGBT Catholics and their families and friends to gather and affirm that "nothing can separate us from the love of God." Report on the service to your Bishop and perhaps in the local Catholic or secular media.
- Pray for the strength and wisdom to continue working for justice in the church.
- Pray for the bishops, so they will be graced by opportunities to get to know and see the faithfulness, goodness, and giftedness of our LGBT loved ones.
- Come up with your own creative possibilities.



Fortunately, the Church of the People of God has been listening to our lesbian and gay loved ones, and their families and friends. That's why polls continue to show increasing grassroots support, acceptance, and affirmation [e.g., a July 2006 poll shows 63% of U.S. Catholics support civil unions for gay couples, 32% oppose them]. That's where we find our hope! It's only a matter of time – time that unfortunately means more hurt -- before the Church hierarchy catches up.

We close with the remarks of a mom and dad who sent the following note with their survey to the Fortunate Families.

"This has been a ten year journey... With the love and respect of those who came before

us, we have been able to move from the pain and sadness, loss and grief to the joy, courage and passion to have a voice in places that our son cannot. To carry the message that God's love is given to EVERY person. That this precious son of ours is the same son that we and God conceived, carried, gave birth to and had baptized into the Catholic Family. Although he feels too tired to fight for a place at the table, we will spend our last breath carrying the message that God loves each of His precious children and we do too."

With prayers that the bishops will soon come to see and cherish our fortunate families and, that in the meantime, our LGBT loved ones, their families, and those that compassionately minister with them are protected by our loving God.

*Mary Ellen & Casey Lopata
Fortunate Families*

Feedback—excerpts

Responses--strong, sad, hopeful—to the Fortunate Families 11-16 email message. Compiled by Casey Lopata.

- How dare they be so evil in the name of a Gospel of Love!!!
- I am concerned by the tone of recent mailings from Fortunate Families concerning your protests of the Bishops letter. What is wrong with the "Courage Approach" to our family members who are homosexual? Their approach is to support their efforts to live in chastity, the same way all baptized Catholics must live. We must all struggle with living in chastity according to our state in life, and a homosexual orientation does not offer an exception.
- You are far more charitable toward the Bishops than they are toward gays, lesbians, their families and friends.

• I find a more suitable title for the (un)pastoral letter could have been "We Love You Unconditionally; Now Change."

• Two years ago, while taking to my Bishop, a member of the Committee writing the paper, I offered to get some knowledgeable and faithful Catholic gays, lesbians and those who minister to them to meet with him and any other committee members. He never contacted me, and I was left with the belief that they didn't want a genuinely honest pastoral approach to ministry to those with a "homosexual inclination", but rather to advocate the official position in a more compassionate manner, maybe to advance their own careers!

• While I acknowledge the hurtful aspects of the language (inclination is my least favorite dirty word), I must look beyond the bureaucratic "boiler-plate" that invariably accompanies this sort of announcement. There are still reasons to be hopeful. The flawed individuals through whom God speaks on "official" matters of the church are NOT the CHURCH. They are but the hierarchy, many of them out of touch and defensive. To put the issue in perspective, the guidelines were considered along with the war in Iraq, stem-cell research and a couple of other hot-button items. THAT is an indication to me that:

-It is very important

-They are going to have to deal with it. As James Alison said, "It's all over but the shouting."

-Other people can now criticize or "fold, staple or mutilate" whatever they come up with

-Papa Ratzis is watching

-The Church started as "house churches"...we may have to go

back to our roots, but we cannot stop doing what we're doing.

• It's hard to believe the Bishops approved this document!!! Let us not become discouraged. The people of God are so much more accepting and that is where we must get our courage and our hope.

• They don't ascribe to gay parents adopting, but the church can baptize their children. I suspect they don't want us to receive Eucharist, but how they will know who is "chaste"? And then there is the theology on chastity according to one's state, all based on natural law, but Thomas used homosexuality to illustrate the point that what is natural for some is not natural for all. Part of me wants to send each a copy... then I say why bother, they would say but it is traditional teaching. Not to worry that the first premises were ill informed.

• People want to hear what the church is doing to prevent our children from being harmed from predators, and what good deeds the Catholic Church is doing. I perceive all this as a smoke screen to avert people from addressing the real issues and how effective the leadership is. The church can learn from what just happened in politics, that eventually using gay people as a scapegoat wears off. The church needs a new marketing campaign! Stop the blame game. Lets talk about a loving and inclusive God.

• I take hope in the changing opinions of Catholics in the pews. If only they can stay long enough for this nightmare of reactionary thinking among the bishops and Vatican to pass.

• The USCCB has almost painted itself into a corner where such a position was inevitable—from pedophilia scandals, gay marriage

issues, seminary inquisitions - this is only a next logical step.

• NPR reported that, in addition to this document, the USCCB was reaffirming "Church Teaching" on artificial means of contraception, [saying] only about 4% of Catholics are in compliance. The USCCB also reaffirmed the importance of Holy Eucharist—and that it should only be given to the 'worthy' (don't we all pray each service, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you"?)—those who are living lives consistent with "Church Teaching". I concluded only 4% of Catholics should be receiving the Eucharist. Priest Shortage Solved! Then I wondered, of those 4%, how many are gay/lesbian—pretty effective contraception in most cases!

• This 'church' is moving even farther away from Jesus - who sought the marginalized, touched the lepers, made object lessons from the despised Samaritans while chastising, rebuking, scorning the hypocrisy of organized religion and self-important leaders of his day.



• Although the document will cause further division, misunderstanding and hurt—and could possibly result in a society where discrimination dissolves into abuse (including endorsement of reparative therapy)—my deepest sadness comes from the pervasive feeling of "we're in, you're out—but we love you anyway."

• It's so very easy to take these statements on a personal level but in the broader context, it tells us much more about the American bishops than about the GLBT faithful.

• We want to and probably will stay with the church—but at what

point do we 'unhook' from the organized religious structures and move to the margins? How do we find/create the true church? The American bishops moved from the "Gospel Edges" to a 'circle the wagon', fear-based mentality.


- That they wouldn't talk with any GLBT Catholic or ministry is astonishing. Jesus was a great one for dialogue—he seemed to enjoy the conversation, loving those who talked with him. At this point, I feel a strong identification with the Syro-Phoenician woman—"But Lord, don't even the dogs get the crumbs under the table?"
- Gay and lesbian Catholics cannot expect any realistic ministry from the magisterium in the near future; they will find it where they always have, in parishes, religious communities, campuses and groups like yours. I think it is also an attempt to undermine diocesan ministries, sadly.
- On the very day this was issued, my Pastor gave me permission to begin Gay and Lesbian Ministry at our parish. Father was very supportive. I left with the feeling that this was important to him and he was glad I was willing to do it.
- I am very close to severing my relationship with the Catholic Church. After 30 years of dedicating my life to bridging the gap between Church hierarchy and the lgbt person in the pew I am weary of the lunacy I see in Church authority.
- While the final document is not terribly encouraging, and contains the oddest language and phrasing, I still find the situation hopeful. Notice the document is written with several obvious 'voices.' The terminology changes, the stern voice speaks, and then is tempered. I think the Bishops could not come to a consensus. Look at the NCS article: you see

'highly amended, wanted to send back to committee, lively debate, they were only willing to 'footnote' Courage.' And there were 37 Bishops who publicly voted against this document. The document says we have no business "in the ministry" if we can't get on board with the document. That would include the company of 37 very good men who also have problems with it. [Editor's note: it was a secret ballot—we don't know who voted against it, or why]. With the weighty issues on the Bishops agenda at this conference, I am pleased we got the attention we did. They are working on it, and on their brothers, and I find that hopeful. While my son will not be comforted in the message or language of this document, I will try to remind him that "it" like the "very soul of the church" is a work in progress. My ministry will be to continue to try to make everyone welcome in MY CHURCH, and at my table. Even the Bishops agreed with that!! Keep up the fight, I really believe this too will pass.

- The bishops never seem to learn, do they? I can only suppose they were warned (diplomatically, of course) not to discuss the document with anyone who might know something about the subject.
- We love our children and that is the bottom line...it certainly goes beyond their bureaucratic maneuvering for whatever their reasons. I truly believe the Holy Spirit has control and it will turn out for the best.
- My initial reaction to the three documents related to sexuality and the Eucharist is, indeed, this might be the event that causes me to walk away from the Church that's been central to my life for all of my 56 years. I need to take a deep breath, maybe



talk to my pastor, gauge my archbishop's follow-through, and pray of course. But when reception of the Eucharist is tagged onto their judgment of what we do in bed, it goes to the heart, and gut.

- The so-called new document is same old/same old; and ongoing proof that they still don't/won't 'get it.' Until there is a transformation of our system of moral thought that is based upon ancient and medieval thinking, we're stuck in this twilight zone of no credibility when our religious leaders speak on moral issues.
- My sorrow and "just anger" are strong—we cannot be silent.
- Such uneducated, stubborn Bishops.
- This Thanksgiving I will give thanks for my son—and for people who inspire and encourage.
- We are praying for Wisdom to visit us and to penetrate the hearts and minds of the leaders of the Church. We believe the Holy Spirit cannot be denied, but it is difficult to watch and wait until the time is right, God's time.  Our children have become disillusioned. Understandable, but no less painful.
- I find it harder and harder to even want to organize and work towards more understanding. I will continue to pray that the Holy Spirit will lead me into the next step of my work in the Church.
- I could barely read through the document without constantly shaking my head NO! to the inconsistencies and poorly written text. I am sure some hack at the Vatican wrote this and forwarded it to the USCCB to rubber stamp. I don't think this document could get a passing grade in most seminaries.

• What can I say? The Church is incorrigible.

• I don't believe much will happen until the gay priests ultimately decide they have had enough of being called "disordered" and begin the real work of banding together and forcing the Vatican to retract such harmful language.

• I am not sure what to do other than cry for our bishops and the total lack of courage and leadership on their part.

• Unfortunately, I think it's time for me to move on. Do you think Jesus would have made a declaration about people without consulting with them?



It's beyond absurd. Total disconnect. There's nothing left from what I can see. I can return when the church changes. (I can't even capitalize the C anymore)

• This newest assault is the "last straw" after fighting the ignorance and hypocrisy of the hierarchy from the Vatican on down for over thirty years. I have long been an advocate of remaining within the church and sacrificing all in the hope of awakening our leadership to the scandalous treatment of gays and lesbians. Being made to feel unwelcome was tolerable when no specific documents were put in place. Rays of hope did occur with "Always Our Children," however this has been some kind of cruel joke. The treatment of women has occasioned the vocation crisis, coupled with the fact that few men wish to be associated with the cover-up and callous disregard for the victims of clergy sex abuse. The offending priests deserve far less censure than the bishops, cardinals, and the papal offices who prevent prosecution, and compensation of the victims. I belonged to DIGNITY and I am finding it impossible to believe

they can create any change. New Ways Ministry is, likewise, impotent in its lobbying power. I have grown weary of "closeted" clergy. Do I remain in selective parishes which are accepting mostly in the degree that they say nothing negative from the pulpit? It is sad when a meeting of bishops takes time and energy to address "issues" such as who is allowed to purify the sacred vessels used at Mass—who practices birth control—and who should be excluded from the Communion Table. I regret that this day has arrived, and I may still be so indoctrinated that I will not act of my anger at the moment. In good conscience and good faith, why do we think we can cling to a church which clearly announces it doesn't want us? The concept of inclusiveness has died, and we can do very little to revive it.

• You are so very correct about the value of "experience". Perhaps we need to do it one Bishop at a time! Until we get rid of the awful language "objectively disordered" and making terrible comparisons, nothing will happen. I'm hoping we can harness the energy ... to make our voices heard! Let us, in the meantime, continue to love and offer unconditional love.

• Disconnecting a person from his/her humanity and imposing on the individual the responsibility to become acceptable, releases those in power from being welcoming of those who will disturb their comfort zone.

• I find great hope that they seem to be linking this position to their position on the rhythm method. Heterosexual Catholics now know that [position] isn't something they can follow. They may begin to realize that these guys generally aren't informed teachers on sexuality. As more and more

people get more comfortable with gay people, even though they want "marriage" reserved for heterosexuals, many seem to be fine with unions. In the last 30 years there really has been a lot of social progress on this issue. Fast enough... no. But people of color still aren't equal, and women still aren't equal... and justice requires we keep fighting.

• Let the bishops be outrageous.... it will help sensible people realize faster what homophobia is and how irrational it is.

• It is very troubling, tedious and tiring to be subjected to the repeated insults of the hierarchy. They diminish their voice in other areas when they speak with discrimination. I wish I could say that they did NOT have some influence with so many families including my own. It's one thing for me to be dismissive of their uninformed and unenlightened view but it's quite another to deal with the everyday discrimination of Catholics who strive to honor, respect and uphold the views of the teachers of our Catholic doctrine. The bishops can poison the waters with their pen in a nanosecond. It's a terrible abuse of their influence and power to impose this document on the faithful without consulting the lived experience of the GLBT community.



• We have to continue to "speak the truth to power," asking the Bishops to explain FULLY what this document means. E.g.: Aren't you really saying to millions of homosexual persons that they must be celibate all their lives? If that is so, since this state of celibacy for homosexual persons is not freely chosen, what is the value?

• The Bishops speak of the great value of friendship. Are the Bishops willing to formally bless

or recognize in any way a committed friendship between two persons of the same sex?

- Rather than disparage, I'm looking at the few nuggets of truth I can work with. I find the clause relative to a 'complaint'/grievance procedure very hopeful. This can be an avenue to providing the kind of real world education our bishops need about human relationships in general, and how it pertains to lesbian and gay Catholics. I find the section urging 'training' extremely hopeful. I will focus on the things that I can have an impact on, and pray on the rest.

- This latest instruction is still a reaction (over-reaction) to the abuse scandal. Our sons and daughters are considered "collateral damage" in their pursuit of the "party line." I think they are guilty of abuse of our children.



NACDLGM Statement

Previously sent to email readers

The Board of Directors and Staff of the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries (NACDLGM) are saddened by the approval of the USCCB document "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination." While the statement acknowledges the need for ministry with homosexual persons, the guidelines were developed without consultation with bishops and pastoral leaders of existing local diocesan outreach ministries, and without consultation with lesbian and gay Catholics. They also ignored the insights of science on sexuality and the valuable contribution of the 1997 pastoral letter, "Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of

Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers."

We are especially disappointed that the guidelines, while recommending that "Church ministers listen to the experiences, needs, and hopes of the persons with a homosexual inclination to whom and with whom they minister," do not in fact reflect the real lives of gay and lesbian people, especially Catholics. The guidelines characterize homosexual persons as focused on sexual inclinations, tendencies, acts and behavior without reference to the integrity of the fuller lives of faith, love, commitment, service and spirituality of Catholic gay and lesbian persons.

For more than 25 years, diocesan ministries have welcomed in the Church gay and lesbian Catholics who understand and affirm their sexual orientation as intrinsic to their identity. It is profoundly sad that many of them and their families will be unnecessarily alienated by the tone of this document.

In calling them to public silence about their identity the Church would render gay and lesbian Catholics less than welcome as equals by baptism and would encourage deception and shame.

In accordance with the Mission Statement of NACDLGM, we urge individual bishops and the Bishops' Conference to "reflect on Sacred Scripture, reflect on Church teaching and pastoral practice, study the social and physical sciences, listen to and ponder the lived experience of lesbian and gay persons and their families," and to develop a truly pastoral and prophetic document on the place of lesbian and gay Catholics in their Church.

Founded in 1994, NACDLGM includes members from 55 Catholic dioceses and 130 parishes. Further information at www.nacdlgm.org.

Calendar

Feb. 10 (Sat), 2007

Day of Reflection for Parents with Lesbian Daughters & Gay Sons. SSJ Motherhouse, **Rochester, NY.** 9:30-5PM. Info: cglfm@aol.com.

March 16-18, 2007

New Ways Ministry's Sixth National Symposium --

Outward Signs: Lesbian/Gay Catholics in a Sacramental Church. Sheraton Bloomington Hotel, **Minneapolis, MN.**

Plenary speakers: Sr. Margaret Farley, RSM, Archbishop Francis Hurley, Bishop Leroy Matthesen, Fr. Richard McBrien, Brian McNaught, Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ, Bishop Joseph Sullivan.

Pre-Conference Workshop Day for Parents and High School/College Personnel with James Alison.

Info: New Ways Ministry, 4012 29th Street, Mt. Rainier, Maryland, 20712, (301) 277-5674, NewWaysM@verizon.net, www.newwaysministry.org.



Thank you for your prayers and support. Since our October newsletter, 12 people and/or groups contributed! We are grateful for your support!!! Fortunate Families, Inc. is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) public charity organization. Your contributions are fully tax-deductible. You can contribute by check or charge, or by going to: http://www.fortunatefamilies.com/make_a_contribution.htm.