

Message to Fortunate Families Readers Concerning 2006 U.S. Bishops' Document: "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care"

Sent Nov. 16, 2006 to email subscribers and included in Fortunate Families November 2006 newsletter

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>

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*