

March 2007

Dear Bishop \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a graduate of Marquette University, a cradle Catholic, a wife and 71 year old mother of a gay son. The reason I attended the recent New Ways Ministry Symposium on Gay/Lesbian Catholics in a Sacramental Church held in Minneapolis was to dialogue with the bishops who would be there. Since you decided not to attend, I want you to hear the story of my son. Before any decisions on a pastoral approach to any group is made, I believe those making the decisions have to know the experience of the people to whom they are offering ministry.

Usually a gay son or daughter comes out to their parents when they have finished their education and are established in their occupation because of the extreme risk they could be cut off from the family. My son came out under questioning when he was a senior in high school. He said he was going out for gas and stayed out all night.

When he came home from school the next day, I had a talk with him. "Son, you can't stay out all night and not tell us. Your father and I were worried sick." His reply was, "Mom, I just had to see some friends." I came to find out that these friends were gay and he had to see them because he was struggling with understanding his sexual orientation. I never thought of not accepting him because of what happened in his sophomore year. He had told me in 6<sup>th</sup> grade he would not be confirmed in the Catholic Church. He could not share his reasons for this decision. He started searching for a church, attended a Baptist youth group for a year, then found a church, which he joined in sophomore year. I noticed his behavior started changing, he was choosing clothes he never would wear, throwing out music tapes and posters, and chanting in his room for long periods of time. My husband and I discovered this church was a cult and we got him out of it. After I learned he is gay, I felt I still had my son and not someone's brainwashed clone. I never could disown or abandon him. After I learned of his homosexuality, he and I had many talks. I told him I would not out him to his father. He would have to do it when he was comfortable. In these talks he shared that he was so happy we got him out of the cult church. I asked why. He shared that what they asked him to do gave him headaches. "Why didn't you leave?" I asked. "Because I knew the cult church was very conservative and I wanted to rip the gayness out of me," is what he responded. I felt pained for what he suffered.

In his senior year he had further suffering. He endured several months of verbal abuse in his calculus class and in the quad area. I noticed he was becoming more and more depressed and questioned him about this. He then informed me of the sexual harassment. We contacted the high school district administrative office and were informed that there was a zero tolerance policy for sexual harassment. My son advised the assistant principal of the problem. It was stopped but then the other students shunned him like a pariah. A few weeks later he came out to his car to go to school and found garbage dumped on the hood of the car. A note was tucked under the windshield wipers saying, "You're as dirty as this garbage."

During this time I never felt comfortable turning to the church for support. From what I knew about how the church viewed homosexuality, I felt I would be blamed or made to feel guilty about having a gay son. I turned to friends. My son did not inform his father until his freshman

year in college when he came home for Thanksgiving break. He became physically ill because of the emotional stress connected with coming out. On Friday evening of that weekend he gathered us in the living room. His older sister already knew as I did. My husband and I were sitting on one side of the room. His sister and he were on the other. He just blurted out, "Dad, I have something to tell you." My husband asked, "What?" He replied, "I'm gay." My husband said, "I know." I was surprised, but my husband suspected that our son might be gay. My daughter said, "Dad, you seem o.k. with this. Is there anything that bothers you about it?" He replied, "My nephew died of AIDS. I don't want that to happen to you." At this point what we had failed to talk about was out in the open and our family situation was much healthier.

My son graduated from college, worked for companies which had defense contracts, and discovered that was not the life work he wanted to do. Presently, he has completed science undergraduate courses for applying to medical school, has passed the MCAT test for medical school, has interviewed with six medical schools and is awaiting one to offer a letter of acceptance. My son is on the road to contribute in a mature and compassionate manner to some of the suffering present in the world. Jesus said, "By their fruit you shall know them." It is my hope that leaders and members of the church would stop judging others and look for what good the gay community contributes in the church and the wider society. At this point I don't believe my son will ever come back to the church.

After learning of my son's sexual orientation, I set out to meet and learn more about people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered. Many of the individuals I met were raised Catholic and received the message there was no place for them in the church. Despite this message, a few have stayed in the church. Why they cannot leave the church is because of Eucharist. To deny Eucharist to baptized Catholics, because someone has judged them, is unchristian.

The following are my observations about the stance of the church in teaching morality regarding sexuality:

In this area among some members and leaders in the church there seems to be a mindset of "absolute righteousness". What I mean by this is these individuals know they have the absolute truth, they have closed minds and they don't want to listen because they know they are right. To me this is akin to an idol since we are all limited human beings who together should be searching for the truth and leaving room for the Holy Spirit to enlighten and inform us. Sometimes the Holy Spirit informs by listening to each other and the laity.

How can the Bishops Council formulate a teaching pastoral when they have failed to consult with the group of people who can inform them from experience? **PARENTS ARE THE FIRST MINISTERS TO THEIR GAY CHILDREN. THEY WERE NOT CONSULTED.**

The Pastoral has changed the wording in describing the gay individual from sexual orientation to sexual inclination. An inclination is something that one can decide against. An orientation is a deep-seated part of a person's makeup. Another aspect of using inclination is that it gives a false hope to parents just learning about homosexuality that there is a possibility the sexual orientation of their son or daughter can be changed. Every gay man and lesbian woman I have met know

their sexual orientation is part of their makeup and they could not change it any more than a heterosexual could become gay.

As a parent with a gay son, it appears to me that many of the erroneous myths regarding homosexuality present in the wider society are also present among the bishops who formulated the pastoral on ministry to gays. Some of these myths are:

Gay individuals are more promiscuous than heterosexuals.

Gay individuals should not speak about their orientation as they may convert or teach gayness to others.

Gay individuals may prey on youth or may be pedophiles.

As a retired bishop you have a unique place. No one can take a diocese away from you. You are like the seasoned wise grandfather or grandmother in families who can offer their wisdom.

Because of your deep interest in social justice issues I urge you to see the rights of Catholic gays as a social justice issue. They have a right to be open about who they are, to be ministered to by the church as a baptized Catholic and to be ministers in the church. I would hope you would have the courage to be a prophetic voice of justice for our community to your brother bishops.

Thank you for reading this.

Sincerely,

Doris M. Hand  
Fullerton, CA