

Introductory Statement relative to gay priests: edited July 12, 2023.

The following statement concerning the AUSCP's support of our brothers in ministry is offered by the **Mutual Support Work Group**. The members who gathered at the June Assembly were asked to support the statement and affirmed it unanimously on June 14, 2023. The statement has been released to the media and is available for download, and is being distributed to the USCCB.

**BEING GAY, ORDAINED, FAITHFUL TO THE CHURCH
AND
APPRECIATED BY THE CHURCH
Are all these possible in today's Church?**

"I am a gay priest who has been an ordained priest for over 50 years and have lived a life of celibacy all those years while being faithful to the Church and my ministry. I recognized my attraction to other men while in the seminary, but like heterosexual men I knew if I wanted to be ordained celibacy was a way of life, which I had to commit myself to. I have never been ashamed of my sexual orientation but have felt deprived because I could not embrace my gayness publicly and celebrate the ministry to which I am called." (From an anonymous priest in good standing in his diocese.)

The number of faithfully serving gay priests in the Catholic Church of the United States is unknown but significant. We, the members of the Association of US Catholic Priests (AUSCP), today, acknowledge these brothers serving across America, who have unjustly suffered from the formal ecclesial situation in which they find themselves.

As gay men, they struggle personally, as do all LGBTQ persons, with the teachings that describe homosexuality as "objectively disordered" ("On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," 31 October 1986, #3; Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2357). The teaching goes on to insist that any man with "deep seated homosexual tendencies" cannot be admitted to the seminary and ordained as a priest. Sacred scripture is interpreted in Church documents in ways that support this position but conflict with the principles of Catholic biblical hermeneutics (CCC #109-119; cf. *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation [Dei verbum]*). Thus, their individual processes of "coming out" to themselves can be deeply stressful and self-alienating, causing them to conduct the process entirely "in the closet," without support. Even finding an understanding and balanced spiritual director or confessor is not always easy.

We believe that following more modern Biblical scholarship which includes the lens of social science, psychology, and other sciences to assist in interpreting the Bible would be fruitful. It is time for Church leadership to authorize a study of its understanding of natural law to include what the modern sciences have unveiled in the 20th century. The Church should encourage moral theologians in a pursuit of a new Catholic ethic of human sexuality and sexual behavior.

Challenges that gay priests experience need to be addressed.

First, while all LGBTQ persons are called by the Church to a life of chastity (CCC, #2348), priests have made a public promise to keep chastity. While courageously maintaining that promise, still they must maintain a "don't ask, don't tell" approach about their sexual orientation with their bishops, fellow priests, and parishioners. Also, when the Congregation for Catholic Education insisted that any man with "deep-seated homosexual tendencies" should not be admitted to the seminary and ordained ministry, already-ordained gay priests could rightly wonder what authenticity and value their ministry has had over their years of ordination (see the

2005 Instruction, “Concerning the Criteria of the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of the Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders”). *How do we assist gay priests while official documents are not supportive?*

Second, gay priests are caught between the truth of their identity and experience, and their role as representatives of the Church and its teachings. This dilemma applies to both the public forums in which a priest finds himself (preaching, catechesis, ministerial programs, and outreach to LGBTQ persons, and so on), and the private forums (pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, and the sacrament of Penance). *How do we assist gay priests, so they do not feel caught?*

Third, this leads to an ongoing identity crisis for the gay priest. “Do I deny who I am and go on serving God’s people (‘don’t ask, don’t tell’), or do I acknowledge who I am as a human being and Christ’s minister, and let the chips fall where they may? Is there a way to integrate my vocations as a human being, a Catholic Christian, and an ordained priest in a healthy and beneficial way for me and the people I serve?” *How do we assist gay priests who are struggling with an identity crisis?*

To that end, the AUSCP asks our Bishops:

- to offer fraternal, pastoral affirmation of their gay priests and their ministry; in other words, to provide a safe environment for them to be who they know themselves to be;
- to admit all candidates for seminary formation and priesthood according to the same criteria: a mature and balanced personality, capable of establishing sound human and pastoral relationships, a full working knowledge in theology and the living tradition of the Church, a solid spiritual life, and a love for the Church (see John Paul II, *Pastores gregis*, #48). The issue is sexual maturity and integration, not sexual orientation;
- and in the spirit of synodal dialogue, to publicly call for the ongoing development of the Church’s teaching on human sexuality, taking advantage of the work already being done by those in the human and social sciences, and many biblical scholars and theologians, in dialogue with the experiences of LGBTQ persons.

The following is a quote from retired bishop (now deceased) Matthew H. Clark after meeting with two gay priests of his diocese. This quote is proof there are bishops who understand the dilemma facing the Church.

“In any case, the two priests of our diocese told me that they are homosexual, and I am glad that they did. It seemed a great relief to them that their bishop — to whom they are so closely bound in priestly identity and ministry — should be aware of this important aspect of their personal reality. I know that I was deeply gratified that they entrusted me with that information. I had come to know and admire them through years of shared ministry. Their simplicity and honesty with me only deepened my regard for them.” (Bishop Matthew H. Clark, *Catholic Courier*, November 11, 2005)

Mutual Support Work Group proposed 3.1.23
Leadership Team endorsed 3.28.23