

Pastoral Ministry with Sexual/Gender Minorities

Created by the AUSCP Women in the Church Working Group ¹

Across our parishes, we encounter faithful Catholics who experience differences in sexual orientation or gender identity. Many attend Mass regularly, *participate* in parish life, and treasure their Catholic identity and the sacraments. These parishioners, who may identify as Same-Sex Attracted, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Non-Binary, Intersex, or Asexual (LGBTQ+) are beloved children of God, members of the Body of Christ, and fellow disciples. This guide seeks to support pastors and pastoral leaders in serving LGBTQ+ Catholics while also helping the Church avoid causing harm.

The need for this help document arose from conversations among pastors, lay ministers and LGBTQ+ Catholics who recognize the difficulty of responding well when parishioners disclose their own or a loved one's sexual orientation or gender identity. These conversations often arise in the ordinary rhythm of parish life, before or after Mass, in confession, or in private meetings, and can be pastorally challenging, especially when personal beliefs and magisterial teaching feel difficult to hold together.

Too often, the Church's first response to LGBTQ+ Catholics has been to wonder or inquire about their sexual behaviors, overlooking their dignity and identity as children of God. Unlike heterosexual Catholics, whose spiritual care is not typically filtered through the lens of sexuality, LGBTQ+ parishioners often encounter barriers that leave them feeling excluded. This guide invites pastoral leaders to listen with the "ears of the heart," to be familiar with supportive pastoral documents, and above all, to respond in the spirit of the Gospel, with welcome, love, and respect.

Pastoral documents to review to help inform responses.

- ["Always our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers" issued in 1997](#)
- ["Fiducia Supplicans, on the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings," a declaration issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2023.](#)
- ["Guidelines for Pastoral Accompaniment of Sexual and Gender Minorities" released by the Diocese of Davenport, Iowa in 2023.](#)

Suggested **DOs** and **DON'Ts** for ministry with LGBTQ+ Catholics

¹ The Women in the Church Working Group would like to express gratitude to the LGBTQ Catholics, pastoral leaders and clergy who collaborated in the drafting of this document.

DO listen with openness and gratitude when a parishioner shares their story.

DON'T dismiss them or pressure them to share more than they are ready to disclose.

DO affirm their desire to live authentically and remain Catholic.

DON'T say they cannot be both Catholic and LGBTQ+.

DO acknowledge the complexity of this topic, the harm LGBTQ+ persons have experienced, and the call to walk in unresolved spaces.

DON'T promise they will never face resistance within the wider Church. You might say: "I can't promise you won't face resistance in the Church, but I can commit to minister to you with respect, compassion and sensitivity²."

DO affirm their dignity as beloved children of God, welcome in your parish.

DON'T condemn them or label them as intrinsically disordered³, sodomites or pedophiles.

DO recognize sexuality/gender identity as one part of their identity.

DON'T reduce pastoral conversations solely to sexual behavior or rely on short phrases that oversimplify the issue like 'love the sinner, hate the sin.'

DO recognize that sharing one's sexual orientation or gender identity requires courage and is an act of trust.

DON'T debate or dismiss a person's lived experience, including their sexual orientation or gender identity.

DO remember that when you speak about sexual and gender minorities, people in the pews may belong to these communities or love someone who does.

DON'T assume that silence means LGBTQ+ parishioners are not present; fear of judgment or rejection often prevents people from disclosing their sexual identity or that of loved ones.

DO support their participation in parish ministries and their contributions.

DON'T require secrecy about their identity.

² The Catechism of the Catholic Church acknowledges these siblings "must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity."

³ In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the term "intrinsically disordered" is used to describe sexual acts that are closed to the gift of life, not to describe LGBTQ+ individuals.

DO note that questions about accompanying LGBTQ+ Catholics are being discussed through the global synodal process and ongoing study groups.

DON'T accuse them of dissenting from Church teaching for raising these questions.

DO provide affirming spiritual resources, which recognize inherent human dignity, and do not seek to “fix” sexual orientation/gender-identity.

DON'T recommend conversion therapy, a dangerous and discredited practice which aims to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

DO appreciate yourself for your commitment to listening and learning how to accompany LGBTQ+ people and their families. Your pastoral support makes a huge difference.

Pastoral Insights from “*Always Our Children*” (USCCB) and “*Fiducia Supplicans*” (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith)

Shared Themes

- **Parental Language:** Both documents frame the Church’s care in familial terms. *Always Our Children* emphasizes family bonds, while *Fiducia Supplicans* speaks of the “mother Church” and a “fatherly blessing.”
- **Pastoral Posture:** The focus is not on “fixing” LGBTQ+ persons but on conversion of heart in ourselves, learning acceptance, love, and accompaniment.
- **Encouraging Growth:** As with all Catholics, ministers are called to recognize and foster the spiritual growth of LGBTQ+ parishioners.
- **Respectful Response:** Cutting off contact is among the most damaging responses; an ongoing relationship is essential.
- **Awareness:** Priests and ministers should monitor their language, humor, and stereotypes to avoid causing harm.

Always Our Children (1997)

- Sorting through the deeper questions of identity is when people most need pastoral support, not isolation.
- Acceptance, alongside truth and love, can itself be a virtue.

- Disclosure of orientation can bring many challenging emotions in families, but also some positive emotions, including relief, which leads to greater honesty.
- Some tensions in life remain unresolved; perseverance in prayer is part of the Christian journey.
- Sexual orientation is a relatively stable aspect of identity.
- The call is to **chastity** (integration of sexuality in maturity), not automatically a call to celibacy.⁴
- The approved “law of gradualism” in Catholic morality reminds us that discipleship is a journey.
- All Catholics retain a right to the sacraments.
- Avoid assigning blame; instead, trust fully in God’s compassion and forgiveness.

***Fiducia Supplicans* (2023)**

- Priests have freedom of discernment in offering blessings; they are not limited to the formulas in the *Book of Blessings*.
- Blessings are a flexible pastoral tool; they require no prerequisites and need not aim at “fixing problems.”
- A blessing is an expression of God’s merciful embrace and the motherhood of the Church.
- Blessings function as evangelization, opening doors to grace.
- Blessing people in “irregular situations” should affirm all that is “true, good, and humanly valid” in their lives, and ask that the presence of the Holy Spirit enrich, heal, and elevate their relationships. (Paragraph 31).
- Pope Francis reminds us: “*A small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties.*” (Paragraph 43).

Resources

⁴ The Catholic Church teaches that we are all called to chastity in our own vocations.

Sexual and gender minorities have a diversity of perspectives on issues of faith, sexuality, and gender, and turn to a diversity of resources for support, encouragement, and spiritual nourishment. What follows is a brief selection of those resources, with which it will be helpful for pastoral ministers of sexual and gender minorities to familiarize themselves. The views expressed in these resources do not necessarily reflect the views of the Association of United States Catholic Priests.

Women in the Church Working Group of AUSCP <https://auscp.org/initiatives/women/>

We create safe spaces for priests and women to become thought-partners in mutual accompaniment, beginning with the reception of one another's stories, their hopes, and laments. One of the virtual conversations in the spirit we hosted was:

"Understanding the Lived Experience of our LGBTQ+ Catholic Siblings, Parents, Family, Priests, and Allies." To watch the video recording of this webinar, go to the AUSCP link above and scroll down until you find this conversation in the spirit. For a more detailed list of resources, including mental health resources, see the link below.

[AUSCP List of Support Resources for LGBTQ Catholics](#)

New Ways Ministry <https://www.newwaysministry.org/>

New Ways Ministry is a Catholic outreach that educates and advocates for equity, inclusion, and justice for LGBTQ+ persons, equipping leaders to build bridges of dialogue within the Church and civil society.

- [LGBTQ-Friendly Parishes & Faith Communities](#): Parishes and faith communities recommended as places of welcome for LGBTQ people.

Fortunate Families <https://fortunatefamilies.com/>

Fortunate Families, a Catholic Family, Friends & Allies Ministry, supports LGBTQ+ siblings by facilitating respectful conversation with bishops, pastors and Church leadership, through sharing personal stories and by working to establish intentional Catholic LGBTQ+ Ministry Sites in dioceses, parishes, educational institutions, and communities.

Dignity USA <https://www.dignityusa.org/>

DignityUSA works for justice, equality and full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ Catholics in our Church and society. Dignity has chapters in various cities which plan in-person and online catholic services and events.

Global Network of Rainbow Catholics <https://rainbowcatholics.org>

The GNRC brings together groups and their members who work for pastoral care, justice, inclusion, dignity and equality for LGBTIQ Catholics and their families in the Roman Catholic Church and wider society.

Outreach <https://outreach.faith/>

Outreach is an LGBTQ Catholic resource that offers news, essays, resources and community for LGBTQ Catholics and those who minister with them in the Catholic Church worldwide.

- [The Outreach Guide to the Bible and Homosexuality - Outreach](#)

Building Catholic Futures <https://buildingcatholic.org/>

Building Catholic Futures (BCF) gives you the tools and insights to serve and share the Gospel with LGBT+ and same-sex-attracted people. Whatever your role in the Church, BCF's consultations, workshops, and resources help you understand what makes the Catholic faith possible, appealing, and fruitful for gay people. The group is made up of LGBT/SSA+ disciples who are leaders in the Church, confident in their faith, and have spent decades mentoring others.

Eden Invitation <https://www.edeninvitation.com/>

Eden Invitation creates space to receive the whole person, grow systems of mutual support, and empower for creative discipleship. They are disciples with LGBTQ+ experiences, building community with others who desire a way of life in congruence with Christ and His Church.



