

The HRC Religion and Faith Program is working to create a world where nobody is forced to choose between who they are, whom they love and what they believe. Thanks in part to this work, more and more Catholics aren't simply engaging in dialogue around LGBTQ equality, they're leading the conversation. They do this work not in spite of their Catholic belief or values, but because of them. To learn more, visit hrc.org/catholic

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COMING HOME TO CATHOLICISM AND TO SELF



Welcome

Dear Friends,



All across this country and around the world, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people are having important conversations about the role of faith in our lives. I'm proud of the contribution this document makes to that conversation, particularly as it relates to Catholic communities. I especially want to thank the advisory team of leading Catholic scholars and activists who helped shape and hone this work. Their expertise made its wisdom and inclusive message possible.

Having grown up in a Southern Baptist household in a small town in Arkansas, the Human Rights Campaign's series on *Coming Home: To Faith, To Spirit, To Self* has great personal significance to me. Even after this nationwide marriage equality victory at the U.S. Supreme Court, our nation continues to be divided into two distinct Americas — one where legal equality for LGBTQ people is becoming more and more of a reality — and the other where LGBTQ people still lack access to some of the most basic necessities of life. In both Americas, religious acceptance is a challenge.

But we have seen progress. The words of Pope Francis have demonstrated a willingness to take steps to more fully embrace LGBTQ people of faith who have long been rejected by the Catholic Church. And progressive laity have given hope to countless LGBTQ people and their families who are longing to hear that their church embraces and accepts them fully.

There remains much work left to do, but I hope the pages that follow speak to the real challenges facing those working to live openly and fully, as their true and complete selves.

Wherever you are on this journey, we hope this resource helps you on your way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chad Griffin". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Chad Griffin
President, Human Rights Campaign

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A Special Note: This publication is primarily intended to serve as a general guide for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) American Catholics who wish to enrich their Catholic faith.



The People in the Pews

For Sister Jeannine Gramick, the core of the Christian message lies in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke when Jesus stands before the congregation at his synagogue in Nazareth and reads from Isaiah 61:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

After the reading, Jesus rolls up the scroll, returns it to an attendant and takes his seat. Looking back at the staring crowd he says simply, "Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

"He's speaking about going out to those who are on the margins," Sister Jeannine explains. "He's speaking about being a voice for the voiceless. This is the task that God really gave to Jesus. This is what he was proclaiming. That's a cornerstone of the Church."

Sister Jeannine, an ally to LGBTQ people and co-founder of New Ways Ministry, is one of the vast multitude of devout Roman Catholics in the United States working for the full inclusion of those who are LGBTQ. Like other Catholic advocates for equality and inclusion, she is well aware of the difference between the people in the pews and the men who hold leadership roles in the church.



LEARN MORE

New Ways Ministry provides ministry of advocacy and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Catholics, working for reconciliation within the Christian and civil communities.

Visit www.newwaysministry.org.

"We have to distinguish when to use the word "church," she insists. "I use the word to mean all the Catholic faithful, and I take that meaning from the Second Vatican Council, which describes the church as 'the people of God.' If, when you speak of the church, you mean the church hierarchy, that's something different."

For James Servino, an openly gay Catholic and a member of St. Matthew's Cathedral Parish in Washington, D.C., the church "is like a small town inside a big city," where he enjoys a welcoming and enriching church community.

Hilary Howes, a transgender woman and LGBTQ advocate, takes a similar stance. "The [Roman] Catholic Church is not a building, not the magisterium, not the leadership, not the laws. It's the people of God. Catholics share a great commitment to social justice. It's baked into our identity. The majority are on the side of the lesbians, gays and bisexuals. The majority believes in equality for transgender people. We're one of the most accepting of all mainline churches."



Nevertheless, there are challenges to be faced, as the church hierarchy continues to control policy and public perception. "There's no teaching on transgender people in the church at all," Howes points out. "Whatever the prevailing attitude of the priest or bishop you come in contact with is often taken as the belief system of the church itself."

For Rosa Manriquez, a member of the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement where she serves as a deacon, being one of the people of God comes with great



The Advent of Pope Francis

responsibility. "When people look into the actual teachings of the church," she says, "they are often surprised by how those teachings encourage a person to question and to have doubts. You listen to the priests and the hierarchy, that's part of it, but you also quiet yourself so you can listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit."

That inner voice is paramount and is formalized in church teachings about the primacy of conscience. "As confirmed Roman Catholics," Manriquez says, "we believe we have access to the Holy Spirit and that it will never leave us. When we do this conscientiously, whatever our conscience tells us to do, we must do. If we don't do it, after praying, that's a sin."

For Manriquez and Howes, as for Sister Jeannine and many others, the dictates of conscience have led to a life devoted to working on behalf of LGBTQ Catholics. "Our conscience is informed by the Holy Spirit and that takes precedence over anything else," Manriquez says. "It doesn't mean we can be childish and stupid. No. It means we examine our conscience against our beliefs. If there's something there that doesn't feel correct, you must pray on it. There's much more to being Catholic than just following the priest. You cannot be lazy."

As a non-LGBTQ ally, Jim FitzGerald, executive director of Call To Action, has been profoundly shaped by the drive of that conscience. "While I was in college, I discovered a very



OFFICIAL TEACHING

The catechism of the Catholic Church – a text that contains dogmas and teachings of the church – distinguishes between "homosexual acts" and "homosexual tendencies."

It names "homosexual acts" as "intrinsically disordered" and "contrary to the natural law."

The term "intrinsically disordered" is not applied to lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals, as their sexual orientation or inclination is viewed by the church as "objectively disordered."

conservative form of Catholicism," he explains. "I knew what I was saying when I declared that women shouldn't be priests and that LGBTQ people are 'intrinsically disordered.' I knew it was wrong but I said it anyway." That experience has shaped FitzGerald's life ever since. "I caused an incredible amount of pain and I will never forget that," he says. "I will work every day for the rest of my life to do penance to make sure that doesn't happen again."

The swiftly changing attitudes about LGBTQ rights in the public forum – reflected in state laws ensuring marriage equality, and upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court – have been mirrored by changing rhetoric from the Vatican and by the increasingly inclusive and welcoming statements of Pope Francis himself.

As FitzGerald explains, "For 20 years, you've heard really repressive statements. Now, all of a sudden, you're hearing that the church should be 'a big tent,' you're hearing 'Who am I to judge?'" FitzGerald is quick to note that the pope's increasingly inclusive language doesn't change church doctrine. However, he's just as quick to note that the pope's welcoming attitude presents a significant new opportunity. "People are more likely to be open, more likely to tell their stories, and we know that the sharing of experiences is what leads to authentic change."

For Sister Jeannine, whose advocacy work led to investigations by the Vatican in the 1980s and 90s, the arrival of Pope Francis has brought tangible change. She tells the story of a transgender woman who was found murdered in Rome in 2013. When the family refused to take responsibility

for her burial, the Vatican provided funeral rites at the Jesuit church in Rome, considered the “Pope’s Church.”

Sister Jeannine felt the change firsthand when leading a pilgrimage of 50 LGBTQ Catholics to Rome in 2015. As with similar visits during the reigns of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, she wrote to the Vatican in advance. Under those men, she received no response. In 2015, however, her group was welcomed. “We were closer than 25 yards to where Pope Francis was giving his address,” she explains. “He walked by, very close to us. We felt that it was not just for our group but that he showed his welcome for all LGBTQ people. He knew who we were.”

Unfortunately, the ripple effect of the Pope’s more welcoming stance is sometimes slow to reach the parishes in the United States. “Most bishops here have been appointed by the last two Popes,” Sister Jeannine points out, “and they were very conservative. With the ones appointed by Francis you see a dramatic difference.”

While many bishops in the United States expressed disdain for the Supreme Court’s ruling on marriage equality for same-sex couples, Chicago’s Archbishop Cupich – appointed by Pope Francis – offered a more positive message. “He didn’t come right out and say he approves of marriage equality,” Sister Jeannine admits. “We’re not at that point. But while other bishops were castigating the court, he was saying that the church respects civil law and respects God’s law that says each person has dignity. Once we get more bishops like that, we’ll see change. It’s a question of waiting.”

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PASTORAL RESOURCES TO RECOMMEND TO YOUR PRIEST

1. *Preparing Catholic Parishes to Welcome Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People and Their Families*, Father Jim Schexnayder [book]
2. *Let’s Talk About Homosexuality: An 8-Part Catholic Conversation*, by Fortunate by Families [online]
3. *A Christian Conversation Guide: Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces for People who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender*, by HRC Foundation [online]



A Person in the Pews

As a member of St. Matthew’s Cathedral Parish in Washington, D.C., James Servino enjoys being part of a welcoming parish. “It’s the seat of Cardinal Wuerl and it’s where John F. Kennedy’s funeral was held, but it’s also a living parish that’s been here for 150 years,” he says.

As a new parishioner, Servino attended meetings of Always God’s Children, a support group originally focused on the parents of LGBTQ children but now encompassing LGBTQ members and their allies. “We’re Catholics,” Servino points out, “so we’re involved in *lots* of different things. Some of us are youth group leaders, some of us are liturgy ministers, some of us are academics.”



Servino is especially pleased with the occasional guest who wanders in. “We always have a sign out on the sidewalk, so tourists walking down the street see this sign welcoming LGBTQ people into the cathedral!” That sense of inclusion extends to church services. “There are such great homilies,” Servino says. “They honor LGBTQ people in a way that challenges the narratives you hear from a lot of church leaders.”

Church demographics have helped pave the way for change. “A lot of same-sex couples attend St. Matthew’s,” Servino

points out. “We also have a mixture of different priests from different orders, so they’re not under a direct diocesan line of command. And we have a lot of non-LGBTQ people who are progressive Catholics.”

Servino, himself, comes from a strong Catholic upbringing in the suburbs of Southern California. “I never left my block for the first 14 years,” he says with a laugh, noting the proximity of his home, church, Catholic school, park and library. When he came out to his parents during high school, he shared his fear that he wouldn’t attain four key goals: family, faith, success and happiness. “Mom was great,” he remembers. “Dad was good, but very quiet.”

His father’s silence proved to be a gathering of wisdom. “He finally said, ‘You already have those things. You won’t lose

them just because you’re gay.’” For Servino, it was a deeply spiritual moment. “I don’t know what it was. It was the first time I really felt this *wholeness*.”

For college, Servino attended the Jesuit-run Santa Clara University. “I got to reconcile these two identities, being gay and being Catholic,” he explains. A high point was giving a guest presentation on LGBT inclusion at Samford University – where openly LGBT students are expelled – with funding from his Catholic university. Nevertheless, being a student at Santa Clara, or a parishioner at St. Matthew’s, is not always easy.

“It’s not free of tension or of hypocrisy,” Servino admits, sharing his desire to face the next challenge. “I need to start living in that tension, and that means showing up and letting people judge me. For my LGBTQ friends, it means telling them that I go to Mass and facing their scrutiny. For the Catholic community, it means holding them accountable, not just being in the choir or sitting in the pews.”

Servino avoided confession for years. “I don’t want to confess to being gay because it’s not a sin,” he explains. “But, because I didn’t want to talk about it, it started to *feel* sinful.” Finally entering the confessional, Servino found a priest who provided clear and welcome guidance. “He said I should find a church community that supports me, and that I should hold onto it once I found it,” Servino says. “That’s what brought me to St. Matthew’s.”

In closing, the priest told Servino, “I absolve you of all sin, real or imagined.” It proved a turning point. “There are myths that are being broken,” Servino says, “but you still hear things that can be so negative about who you are. You build up this imaginary persona that doesn’t even exist in God’s eyes.”

Servino embraces the long history of the church. “Catholicism is like a thousand-year-old language,” he says. “It’s a language my parents gave me. It helps me speak in ways that have lasted for millennia.”

His core beliefs provide hope for the future. “I believe in the mystical body of the church,” Servino says, referring to St. Paul’s description of the church as a body whose many parts are equally essential to its survival. “Just because the church doesn’t understand its LGBTQ parishioners doesn’t mean it can cast them out, and just because I don’t agree with certain members of the church doesn’t mean I can cast them out either.”





A Transgender Journey to the Church

For Hilary Howes, the journey to the Catholic Church was a unique one. “I was raised with no religious training whatsoever,” she points out. “I didn’t have that child’s view of God and I wasn’t damaged by the Catholic Church as so many LGBTQ people are.” Her first experience of the church came when she – assigned male at birth and living as a man – married a Catholic woman. It wasn’t until after her transition that she became interested in the spiritual elements of her adopted faith.

“Going through hormone therapy,” Howes explains, “I gained emotional powers I never knew existed. In that context I started searching for spirituality.” Her marriage intact, she and her wife attended a local parish in Greenbelt, Maryland, but were repelled by its conservative attitudes. Howes, though, came across an ad for the Catholic Community of Greenbelt, an Intentional Eucharistic Community (IEC) founded in reaction to the increasingly conservative local parish.

IECs were established after Vatican II by lay people motivated by that council’s encouragement of more active lay participation and leadership in the church. Howes explains, “The one in Greenbelt was started 20 years ago.” Visiting priests administer communion but services are directed by the laity. “What our church features is a shared homily,”



Howes says. “Everyone who comes gets to relate the [liturgical] readings to their own day-to-day lives. Everyone gets to speak.”

For Howes, the experience was transformational. “I had never understood concepts like prayer,” she admits. “Now when people talked about how it fits into their lives, it wasn’t a priest’s view from antiquity. It was personal, right now, *them*. It seems like this is how the church started; a teacher and people who believe, and very little else.”

In her advocacy work, Howes often finds herself in meaningful dialogue with church leaders. The personal connections can be surprising, as priests recognize elements of their own journey in Howes’. “My story of coming to terms with who I am reminds them so much of their discernment in becoming a priest,” she explains. “It’s not an easy path. They’re celibate. They’re a sexual minority in a sense. Very often they’ve faced resistance from their family. It was eye-opening to realize those connections.”



DECIDING TO TELL OTHERS

If you wish to disclose that you are transgender to your parish, consider:

Some Benefits of Disclosure

- Living an authentic and whole life
- Making a viable spiritual path through continued participation
- Becoming a role model for others

Some Risks of Coming Out

- Not everyone will be understanding or accepting
- You may be denied the Eucharist
- You may be disallowed from serving as a baptismal sponsor

To learn more about coming out transgender, visit hrc.org/transgender.



A Lesbian Mother Seeking Change

Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of DignityUSA, sees two distinct obstacles in the path of Catholic women who are lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

"We have to get through two huge experiences of exclusion and oppression in the church," she points out. "As women we have to deal with all the ways that the official Catholic Church is misogynist." She notes that ordination is not available to women, that women are excluded from policy making and that there are distinct pay differences for women who do find a place in church leadership. "You never see women at the altar," she says, "and you hear the church speak against your reproductive health needs."

Then the road becomes even more difficult with the added layers of homophobia, biphobia or transphobia. Duddy-Burke explains, "Lesbians leave the church at a higher level than anyone else. Many go on to be ministers or priests in other denominations, because they know they're called to the ministry."

Duddy-Burke's advice to women who wish to remain in the church is clear and concise. "You need to recognize that the oppression you feel is real and that it's evil," she says, "There's no justification for it. I urge you to stay and work against it for as long as that is healthy for you."



To ensure spiritual health, Duddy-Burke also urges women to find a supportive and affirming community. "It could be your parish or an Intentional Eucharistic Community, or it could be a branch of Dignity. It's a place where you can bring your whole self and not censor who you are. It's a place that will challenge you spiritually and support you personally."

She knows first-hand that the road can be especially confusing for LGBTQ parents. "The Church just doesn't know how to deal with families headed by same-sex couples, or by a transgender parent," she says. "They don't know if they can baptize our kids. They don't know if our kids are welcome at their schools."

Community attitudes can also vary greatly. In her work with DignityUSA, Duddy-Burke has seen the gamut of responses. "We had a pastor kick the kid of same-sex parents out of the school and then saw other families withdraw in solidarity," she remembers. "We also had a lesbian couple whose child was refused baptism and no one in the parish would speak up for them. It all depends on who's in charge and what they think the bishop will allow them to do."



A Shift in Doctrine

Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry, is helping to expand the number of places where LGBTQ Catholics can find a warm welcome. “We do lots of work creating LGBTQ-friendly parishes,” he explains. “There are now more than 200 across the United States, and it’s steadily increasing.” He notes the particular challenge for those living outside of urban areas. “In rural Indiana, if your own parish isn’t welcoming you might have to travel 200 miles to reach the next one, so your choices are limited. In New York City, you might be able to walk a few blocks and find what you’re looking for.”

DeBernardo points out a key shift in perspective required of church leaders who wish to reconsider the issue. “The church hierarchy has an act-centric morality,” he says, “but it should have a relationship-centric morality. Theology should be about relationships, which ones are good and holy and life-giving and which ones aren’t. Jesus doesn’t talk about sex at all. What he does talk about is the quality of a relationship. So let’s look at the relationships that Jesus promotes, at their depth and meaning, rather than guessing at what he would have said about the other stuff.”

According to DeBernardo, church laity have already adopted a relationship-centric morality, largely in response to questions of birth control. “Most Catholics,” he explains, “are heterosexual, married and practicing contraception, which is banned by the Catholic Church. You’re not supposed to have a sexual act that is not open to new life, but 98 percent of Catholic Americans don’t accept that ruling.” The notion that same-sex activity is wrong simply because it can’t be procreative has thus become a non-issue for most Catholics. “That, more than gay liberation or anything else,” DeBernardo says, “has changed the Catholic mentality toward one that accepts LGBTQ relationships.”

Father Luke, a gay priest who requested a pseudonym to protect his standing in the church, explains that current policies are largely grounded in a doctrinal note written in 1986 under the guidance of Cardinal Ratzinger, who became Pope Benedict XVI in 2005 and remained in office until his resignation in 2013. “It’s a theological opinion that became part of the church catechism,” Father Luke explains. “It’s the cementing of a formal view of homosexuality as an intrinsic moral disorder.”

“If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?”



Pope Francis’ famous “Who am I to judge?” comment was made in response to a question about the acceptability of gay men as priests. Although his statement is not official church teaching, many Catholic observers see it as a first step toward neutralizing the policies supported by Pope Benedict.



Leaving the Priesthood

Resigned priest Abdel Sepulveda entered the priesthood to avoid facing the truth of his gay identity. "I was very involved in a youth group from middle school through college," he says. "All the other guys would get married, or go away to grad school and *then* get married. I went to seminary instead. It was a call from God but it was also a way to deal with my sexuality."

But Sepulveda struggled to maintain celibacy in the seminary and, after ordination in 2003, left the priesthood voluntarily in 2005. "I wasn't able to be a healthy human being," he says. "I was leading a double life. I was drowning." Parting from the priesthood, though, was a difficult process. "I felt that I was letting people down, and betraying a part of God in me. I missed the sense of mission."

Sepulveda sought counseling, found an apartment and took a job teaching Spanish in the Catholic school where he now serves as assistant principal. In the process, he's rediscovered his sense of mission. "I deal with a lot of human issues that go beyond curriculum and test taking," he explains, "but there's still an aspect of connecting with the divine that I miss. I miss being able to have a conversation with someone and discussing the presence of God in their lives. I miss having that constant God-talk that pushes people closer to God – because it pushes me closer to God as well!"

He has rediscovered part of that calling through his work with DignityUSA. As an ordained presider he went through the organization's rigorous vetting process, including a background check to ensure that candidates didn't leave the priesthood because of scandal, that they are open to using inclusive language and that they recognize women as equal members of the church.

It's clear that Sepulveda has found a new richness in his life through his work with Dignity. "I'm spiritually fed," he says. "I'm also in a very mature place when it comes to my faith. I'm very much aware of God's presence in my life, and I'm also very much aware that the dogma or teachings that reject LGBTQ people don't come from God, even if they do come from the Church."

His relationship with the church remains strong. "I do feel very priestly still," he says, noting that an ordained priest is *always* an ordained priest. "The church is still very much a part of me. It's like that uncle or aunt whom you love but you're also not afraid to call them on their bull crap, not afraid to challenge them."

According to the precepts of natural law – a concept originating with ancient philosophers and developed as church doctrine by Thomas Aquinas – goodness is that which is "naturally ordered." In contrast, if something is named intrinsically "disordered," it is morally bad. Father Luke explains that, "Under this teaching, you're kind of doomed if you're gay." The results have been especially debilitating for LGBTQ people wishing to enter religious orders. "Pope Benedict issued an edict based on this doctrine." **It states that the Church "cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so called 'gay culture.'"**

Father Luke entered a religious order himself just prior to the 1986 ruling, and was open with his superiors about being gay and being in a loving relationship with a man for 10 years before entering the seminary. In the years following, such openness would not have been possible. "Between the mid-70s and late-80s there were a lot of pastorally minded priests and bishops who looked on sexual activity between people of the same gender in the same way they looked on heterosexual activity outside of marriage. Neither was permitted, but they also knew that these were good people in the parish and they let them be." The downward shift came with the shift in doctrine. "Priests started talking about family issues," Father Luke points out, "or talking about sex from the pulpit. For 10 years, we had this strident Vatican approach, with homilies against gay marriage, against Proposition 8."

It appears, now, that the shift might be toward the relationship-centric perspective that DeBernardo seeks, though the more inclusive rhetoric from the Vatican has yet to result in a change of doctrine or policy.



HAS GOD CALLED YOU TO A RELIGIOUS VOCATION?

Find welcoming seminaries at the Institute for Welcoming Resources www.welcomingresources.org/seminaries.htm.



Women Priests Ordained

Like Abdel Sepulveda, Rosa Manriquez has a complicated history with the church. "I went to Catholic school from first grade through college," she explains. "I had this vision in mind of what a good Catholic girl and woman looks like. That's what I aspired to be."

The realities of life challenged Manriquez to step outside the limitations of her adopted persona. She was challenged, first, by the discovery that her husband was gay. Later she learned that her daughters are lesbians. In response, she became one of the leading advocates for LGBTQ inclusion in the church, though the image of the "good Catholic girl" continues to haunt her. "There are still times," she says, "when I have to ask myself, 'What's more important, pleasing others, pleasing your ego or living as God intended?'"

Already a deacon, Manriquez is completing her Master of Theology degree, a requirement for ordination with Roman Catholic Womenpriests, an organization that identifies itself "at the forefront of a model of service that offers Catholics a renewed priestly ministry in vibrant grassroots communities where all are equal and all are welcome."

"It's more than 10 years that women have been ordained like this," she explains. "Bishops world wide have discussed the need for ordination of women but they've done it underground because they're afraid to speak out."

A core group of those bishops chose to act on their convictions in 2002. Seven women were ordained by three bishops in a ceremony aboard a riverboat on the Danube, because bodies of water don't fall under a diocese's jurisdiction and no permission would be needed from local church authorities. Two of the women were then named bishops so that they, in turn, could ordain future women priests.



Francis DeBernardo, of New Ways Ministry, explains, "Of course, people question the validity of these ordinations, but it's important to note the difference between what is 'valid' and what is 'licit.'" Like Sepulveda, he notes that an ordained priest is a priest forever, even if he leaves the church. "You can't undo a sacrament," DeBernardo says. "When a priest leaves the priesthood, he leaves the institution but he has an indelible mark on his soul. A Mass performed by such a priest is entirely valid, but it's not licensed. It's not legitimized by the church."

Manriquez is prepared to defend her ordination. "When people say you're not a real priest, I explain that it's like marriage, which is also a sacrament." She elaborates with a telling metaphor. "Let's say two Roman Catholics decide that they're in love and want to get married but their families say, 'No. We'll kick you out of the house.' The couple elopes and they come back home and, guess what, they're married. The family may not talk to them anymore but they're married. It's the same thing with ordination."



Finding Your Path

For many LGBTQ Catholics, the struggle – and the reward – comes with finding the path that is right for them. As Francis DeBernardo mentioned, location can be key.

“Look for the right parish,” advises Father Luke. “Shop about. Speak with LGBTQ organizations in your area to learn what people are saying. Find the LGBTQ friendly priests at the Catholic schools. Get connected through organizations like DignityUSA or New Ways Ministry.” His personal hope, though, is that LGBTQ Catholics will find a welcoming home in their local parish.

Jim FitzGerald of Call To Action recognizes the enormous range of parish attitudes. “I led an LGBTQ youth caucus recently,” he says. “Some of these young people were just weeping. It was a spiritual tearing apart of themselves. They found the church to be so close minded, so mean spirited. But others were saying, ‘I really wish I could understand what you’re going through. I’ve been part of my parish for 20 years, and my pastor is blessing same-sex marriages on the back lawns of my friends.’”

“All of us are created in the likeness and image of God,” FitzGerald says. “All of us need to be the person God means us to be. Whenever that is prevented it causes spiritual damage beyond words. That’s why it is so important to all of us who want an inclusive church. We’ve connected with those individuals, we’ve seen the pain in their eyes, we’ve seen them torn apart spiritually.”

Hilary Howes encourages people to take part in parish life when possible, but urges caution. “What you can do is variable on how confident you are in both your Catholicism and your gender and sexual identity,” she explains. Like Rosa Manriquez, she stresses the importance of the primacy of conscience.

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WAYS TO FIND A WELCOMING CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

1. New Ways Ministry maintains a list of LGBT-friendly parishes at newwaysministry.org/gfp.html.
2. Find an Intentional Eucharistic Community at www.intentionaleucharistic.org.
3. Find a DignityUSA chapter at dignityusa.org.



What Is The Primacy of Conscience?

Pope Francis said, “So we also must learn to listen more to our conscience. Be careful, however: this does not mean we ought to follow our ego, do whatever interests us, whatever suits us, whatever pleases us. That is not conscience. Conscience is the interior space in which we can listen to and hear the truth, the good, the voice of God. It is the inner place of our relationship with Him, who speaks to our heart and helps us to discern, to understand the path we ought to take, and once the decision is made, to move forward, to remain faithful.” (Sunday Angelus)

“Regardless of what someone else might be saying, you know in your heart what is right and wrong,” Howes says. “That’s our gift from God and you have to have confidence in that. You have to trust the Holy Spirit within you more than what someone in authority might say.” She recognizes that listening to that inner voice might mean leaving the church. “If the call is for you to go somewhere else, you have to trust in that,” she says. “If the call is to stay and fight, you have to trust in that too.”

Howes reserves particular praise for non-LGBTQ parishioners working to create inclusive worship spaces. “I think they’ve realized the very essence of Christianity in being an ally to people who are marginalized,” she says. “I think those who claim that there’s some sort of war between LGBTQ people and Christians are actually anti-Christian themselves. They are not Christ-like. We have to call that for what it is. I think our allies are really showing us the path.”

Rosa Manriquez returns to the core of her faith when offering advice to LGBTQ persons or allies struggling with their experience of the church. “All of us are beautiful creations of God from day one,” she says. “The only thing that can separate us from that is ourselves. If you feel you have a relationship with God, trust it, look for the good, look for what feeds the good in you. If that leads you out of the Catholic Church, follow that path – but if it leads you back, you need to follow it back. But first, quiet your soul. Don’t be afraid. Be the best creation that you know you are.”



Firings in the Catholic Workplace

One of the unfortunate repercussions of marriage equality is the firing of church employees when they go public with their same-sex weddings. Teachers and other professionals have been promptly dismissed upon posting wedding announcements to Facebook or other social media.

Sister Jeannine of New Ways Ministry offers some words of wisdom. "First, know that you have been unjustly fired. And know that you are participants in the passion of Jesus,

Jim FitzGerald feels that education is key to the fight against LGBTQ discrimination. "A lot of church workers don't realize what rights they have under church law," he points out. "They also don't understand what rights they *don't* have."

He worries that the problem only comes to the attention of the general public when a story hits the media. "We need to educate the entire Catholic community," he says. "Often they haven't a clue that a teacher or someone who works for a school or hospital can be terminated for something as simple as posting a picture of their partner and themselves on a Facebook page. Catholics get outraged when they learn about this, so education is a critical element"



that you're martyrs to the cause." While looking to a brighter future, she is clear about the difficulties in reaching it. "You always have the martyrs who go ahead," she says. "I admire people who say who they are and know that they'll pay unjust consequences for it. I admire people who say, 'I'm married, I love this person and I proclaim that publicly.' Future generations will honor them."

New Ways Ministry is working hard to change institutional policies at Catholic institutions across the country. "We're asking for a statement that they will not discriminate on gender, on sexual orientation or on marital status, because often people aren't fired until they get married," Sister Jeannine explains. Her own order – the Sisters of Loretto – recently adopted a resolution that extends their non-discrimination language to encompass gender, gender identification, sexual orientation and marital status, and includes those who show their support for marriage equality, since some firings have been of non-LGBTQ allies who voice their support for marriage equality.

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation and Call To Action are developing grassroots effort that reflect classic labor disputes across the last century. "We're trying to get church workers connected with each other," FitzGerald says, "for pastoral support but also to lay the groundwork for strategies that can address this problem. We want to be prepared because we assume this is a pattern that's going to be increasing. We want the elements in place so that everyday Catholics can be mobilized."



CHURCH WORKER JUSTICE

If you have been terminated, suspended or sanctioned by a Catholic-affiliated entity such as a school, hospital, charity or parish, because you are LGBTQ, contact HRC Foundation's Religion and Faith Program to talk confidentially at religion@hrc.org.



The Genesis of Change

It's those "everyday Catholics" that Jim FitzGerald looks to when he envisions lasting change for the church. "It's the person who is rooted in Catholic tradition," he says. "It's the person who has no problem with marriage equality. It's the individuals sitting in the pews who love their Church and know it can be better. They're confused when their bishop or the Vatican releases a statement that is nowhere close to being in line with their own values."



Sister Jeannine, too, looks for change to generate among the Catholic faithful. "Historically, the Christian church has changed how it views sexuality but only officially after the change first occurred at the bottom, among the people. As a community, when we listen to each other's stories, and feel for each other, we'll experience a change of attitude." She sees new hope in the attitudes professed by Pope Francis. "Francis says don't obsess on cultural issues. He asks us to be obsessed with loving people, with supporting people, with having compassion. That's the first step."

Marianne Duddy-Burke notes that different people have different strengths when it comes to enacting change. "For some folks it may mean being a teacher in a Catholic school and being willing to say this is the official teaching but this is where people find that lacking. It may mean being an advocate for transgender equality. It may mean becoming a public official and talking about how the Catholic commitment to social justice drives your personal convictions."

It's important to recognize that all the people who shared their thoughts on LGBTQ advocacy for this publication spoke from a position of concern for the church itself, and for its future. "It especially struck me," Hilary Howes says, "when I started to work with a Catholic strategy group at HRC that the concern of this incredible group of intelligent, thoughtful people was primarily for the church itself. They worried that it would become completely irrelevant in the 21st century. Even though they were marginalized, they knew there was a reason for the church to exist and that it had good things, important things, to offer. That's why they wanted to help it into this place where it would be accepting."

Howe recognizes this moment as one in the church's long evolution. "It's the story of the church," she says. "We're following in the steps of Christ and Christ called his church to accept the marginalized. He did it over and over again, and he did it loudly. To do that, to follow in Christ's path, that is a spiritual path. There's some suffering involved, but ultimately it offers great rewards."



JOIN THE CONVERSATION

#LGBTCatholics share your story and
#ownYOURfaith because you are
#WelcomedbyGod

Conclusion

For LGBTQ Catholics, the struggle for the soul of the Catholic Church is ongoing. The bruising theological pushbacks by conservative Catholics complicate efforts to reshape the pastoral tenor toward LGBTQ people. Yet the church has steadily evolved over two millennia, transforming itself as it acknowledges and benefits from new understandings and new discoveries made through the course of history. It stands now on the brink of another step toward understanding the rich complexity of humankind and what it means for *all* people to be made in God's image.

For LGBTQ people and their allies it's important to keep in mind a few key points on that continuing path to new understanding:

- The church is the people in the pews; it is their compassion and their voice that will bring about transformation.
- Parishes vary greatly in their welcoming attitude and inclusion; it may take time to find the spiritual home that is right for you.
- Many church leaders are ready to provide pastoral support to LGBTQ parishioners though they may not be able to do so openly.
- There is a wealth of resources for LGBTQ Catholics in the form of online information and forums, and in the continuing advocacy of organizations intent on building a fully inclusive and fully relevant Church for our times.
- Finally, the example of Jesus's own life sets a high standard, calling us to love and affirm people from all walks of life, and insisting that we offer the joys of the church to all who attend. He is the only gatekeeper and the doors are wide open.

We hope that you take full advantage of the resources listed in the following pages, and of the advice and insights of the many people who contributed to this conversation. We wish you well on the road ahead!

Resources

LGBTQ AND ALLIED ORGANIZATIONS

Call To Action

A national organization that educates, inspires and activates Catholics to act for justice and build inclusive communities through a lens of anti-racism and anti-oppression principles.
www.cta-usa.org

Catholic Association for Lesbian and Gay Ministry

An association of ministries that affirms and provides inclusive pastoral care with lesbian and gay people and their families and friends in the Catholic community.
www.calgm.org

Catholics for Choice

A national voice for Catholics who believe that the Catholic tradition supports a woman's moral and legal right to follow her conscience in matters of sexuality and reproductive health.
www.catholicsforchoice.org

Corpus USA

A faith community affirming an inclusive priesthood rooted in a reformed and renewed church.
www.corpus.org

DignityUSA

A national organization working for respect and justice for people of all sexual orientations, genders, and gender identities in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy, and support.
www.dignityusa.org

Equally Blessed

A coalition of four Catholic organizations that have spent more than 120 years working on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their families.
www.equally-blessed.org

Familia es Familia

A public education campaign that aims to build support among Latino communities for acceptance of LGBTQ family members.
www.familiaesfamilia.org

Fortunate Families

A resource and networking ministry with Catholic parents of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children.
www.fortunatefamilies.com

Intentional Eucharistic Communities

Small faith communities, rooted in the Catholic tradition, which gather to celebrate Eucharist on a regular basis.
www.intentionaleucharistic.org

NETWORK Lobby

A Catholic leader in the global movement for justice and peace — educates, organizes and lobbies for economic and social transformation.
www.networklobby.org

New Ways Ministry

A ministry of advocacy and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Catholics, and reconciliation within the larger Christian and civil communities.
www.newwaysministry.org

Roman Catholic Womenpriests

A national organization that promotes and supports the ordination of women and men in a renewed priestly ministry in the Roman Catholic Church. www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org

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Schexnayder, James A. *Setting the Table: Preparing Catholic Parishes to Welcome Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People and Their Families*. 2011.

Printed Resources

DeBernardo, Francis. *Marriage Equality: A Positive Catholic Approach*. Mount Rainier, Md.: New Ways Ministry, 2011

Homosexuality, A Positive Catholic Perspective: Questions and Answers in Lesbian/Gay Ministry. 3rd ed. Mt. Rainier, Md.: New Ways Ministry, 2003.

For more information and resources, visit www.hrc.org/catholic.

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