

Creating Welcoming and Inclusive Communities for LGBTQ+ Persons

LGBT Initiative Team Resource and Discussion Guide



This meeting kit is adapted from the resource and discussion guide provided by MSJC for use by Marianist communities (lay or religious) and parish groups who seek a deeper understanding of this topic and prayerful response in light of Catholic Social Teaching and the Marianist charism.

Introduction

As Marianists, we are committed to supporting one another in the challenges of daily living and in working for the coming of the reign of justice. It is clear that there are LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and other identities) members within the Marianist Family, as well as within the broader Church community, who do not feel free to be themselves. These persons have a deep spirituality, but they often feel alienated from their communities. However, we believe that Marianist communities are committed to ongoing dialogue and collaboration, remembering that all of us are bearers of the charism and Marianist vision. As individuals and as community we can help transform the lives of our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters through living lives of inclusion and love. We can also enrich lives by intentionally welcoming others and inviting them to use their gifts, talents, and backgrounds. Through this message of inclusion, mutuality, and love, we can create communities where all are welcomed and affirmed for who they are.

OPENING PRAYER

Good and gracious God, soften the hearts of your people. Teach us to love, fully and radically, all of your children as their whole selves. As you have sent us your advocate in the Holy Spirit, help us to learn what it looks like to be advocates for people of all

sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions. Your Wisdom is like the finest oil, waiting to be pressed from the human heart, from every nation, from every people, from every child. In your Wisdom, O God, show us the way. Amen.

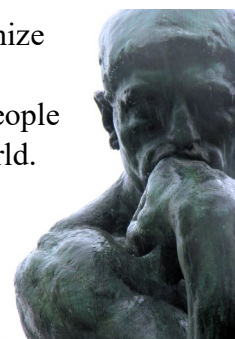
Food for Thought

Here are quotes from two members of the LGBT Initiative Team and a video to watch:

I serve on this Team because I am passionate about LGBTQ+ issues in the Catholic Church. LGBTQ+ people are among the most marginalized in our communities. I believe that if Jesus were here, he would side with these minorities. More than simply working toward acceptance, I hope my work on the LGBT

Initiative Team serves to recognize and include the unique, indispensable gifts LGBTQ+ people bring to the Church and the world.

In the numerous documents that Pope Francis has written since the beginning of his papacy, he repeatedly reminds us that we must engage in



honest, sincere dialogue and make the effort to encounter each other lovingly . If bona fide dialogue and encounter are to occur between people who may have differences, disagreements, or lack of understanding of each other, both parties must be open to being transformed. Of course, this involves deep listening. I feel this is in tandem with *Gaudium et spes*, a Vatican II document, that reminds us “the Church [which includes *all* of us] has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.” It is also in line with the basic tenet of Catholic Social Teaching: the dignity of the human person. If we are indeed encountering each other as the Gospels instruct us (with respect, dignity,

and honor), as well as paying attention to reliable God-given science, our view and understanding of humanity in all of its beautiful diversity will be deepened, and our lives will be enriched. This includes issues, of course, that affect those of us who identify as LGBTQ+ and our loved ones who wish to maintain our rightful identity as baptized Roman Catholics.

“*Living Our Marianist Charism: Embracing the LGBTQ+ Community*” is a 10-minute video that offers a collection of stories and perspectives from LGBTQ+ persons, family members, and allies connected with the Marianist Family (www.msje.net/lgbt-initiative).

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- After reading the quotes and watching the video, what is one word that summarizes your reaction?
- Did hearing people’s experiences in the video affect the way you see LGBTQ+ people in the Church? If so, how?
- What do you see as your call as a Marianist regarding inclusivity toward LGBTQ+ persons?
- Give an example of what social justice toward LGBTQ+ people looks like.
- How do you think Mary, as a mother, would respond to an LGBTQ+ person?
- As Marianists and Christians, what action might we commit to take (individually or as a community) to respond to this issue?

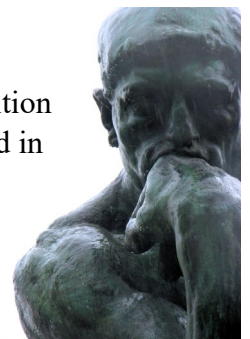


Food for Thought

Catholic Teaching

Being a faithful Catholic requires a balance of pastoral concern for LGBTQ+ persons and the need to affirm Catholic teaching. The Catholic Church acknowledges homosexuality as a sexual orientation and does not place judgment on the orientation itself. However, because sexual activity between same-sex persons cannot lead to the creation of new life, such acts are viewed as immoral.

Consistent with other Church documents, the most definitive position of the Catholic Church is articulated in the following sections of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Here are summaries of these sections.



Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who

experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. Homosexual acts are contrary to the natural law. (§ 2357)

The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. . . . They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. (§ 2358)

Homosexual persons, like heterosexual persons, are called to chastity. (§ 2359)

Catholic teaching on homosexuality is complex, and misconceptions are common. For example:

- **Homosexual orientation vs. homosexual activity:** The Catholic Church does not equate a person's sexual orientation with sexual activity. It recognizes that one's sexual orientation is given or discovered, not chosen.
- **Words that sting:** Terms like "intrinsically disordered," "contrary to natural law," and "objectively disordered" are technical, philosophical phrases that are difficult to accept without a fuller understanding of the Church's interpretation of natural law. Not surprisingly, some LGBTQ+ persons and their loved ones find these words hurtful.

As Marianists, we must be pastorally sensitive but mindful of the Church's stance that genital activity only has a place in a marriage between a man and a woman. This does not mean that a gay or lesbian person is somehow defective or "badly made" (often the implication of the word "disordered") or that God has in some way rejected him or her. Inclinations to homosexual acts in no way diminish the full human dignity or intrinsic worth of the person.

Church Documents

The Catholic Church has issued several documents related to the dignity of the human person, human sexuality, and homosexuality specifically. Here are examples calling for ministry to gay and lesbian people:

“. . . the Christian community should offer [homosexual people] a special

degree of pastoral understanding and care.” (*To Live in Christ Jesus*, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1976)

“. . . we would ask the bishops to support, with the means at their disposal, the development of appropriate forms of pastoral care for homosexual persons.” (*Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986)

“Sad to say, there are many persons with a homosexual inclination who feel alienated from the Church. Outreach programs and evangelization efforts ought to be mindful of such persons. . . . Essential to the success of ministry to persons with a homosexual inclination will be the support and leadership of the bishop and other pastoral leaders. . . . A welcoming stance of Christian love by the leadership and the community as a whole is essential for this important work. This is particularly important because more than a few persons with a homosexual inclination feel themselves to be unwelcome and rejected. Church policies should explicitly reject unjust discrimination and harassment of any persons, including those with a homosexual inclination.” (*Ministry to Persons with Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006)



“Welcome homosexual persons into the faith community and seek out those on the margins. Avoid stereotyping and condemning. Strive first to listen. Do not presume that all homosexual persons are sexually active. Learn more about homosexuality and Church teaching so your preaching, teaching, and counseling will be informed and effective . . . every person has an inherent dignity because he or she is created in God’s image . . . the Christian Community should offer its homosexual sisters and brothers understanding and pastoral care.” (*Always Our Children*, pastoral message from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Marriage and Family, 1997)

Two additional statements, one from Vatican II and the other from Pope Francis, are important teachings that give fuller context to the Church’s position regarding LGBTQ+ persons:

“In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a

law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor.” (*Gaudium et spes*, 1965)

“If a homosexual person is of good will and is in search of God, I am no one to judge.” (Pope Francis, *America Magazine*, Sept. 30, 2013)

The Marianist Charism

The LGBT Initiative Team, with its goal of justice and hospitality, provides opportunities for all Marianist communities to strive to be places where all members feel at home. As a lay Marianist once said, “What is unique about the Marianists is the spirit of family. I am always welcome; I am part of the community; my presence and my input are valued; and I am invited to help shape the future of the Marianists.”

The LGBT Initiative Team wants to foster a community where persons with different sexual orientations can dialogue honestly, listening to one

another’s opinions. We desire to promote a community where all can be truthful without fearing negative responses and where members of the LGBTQ+ community can feel comfortable self-identifying. We hope that the Marianist Family will be a prophetic leader in achieving this goal within the larger Church family.



Team Action for Justice

Addressing LGBT Issues with Youth - A Resource for Educators

Today, young people grow up in a complicated world that presents a constant tug-of-war between Gospel values and cultural pressures. This is especially true for LGBTQ+ youth, many of whom feel isolated and excluded because they are seen as “different.” The LGBT Initiative Team produced a 16-page booklet for teachers, administrators, campus ministers, and others who work with young people. This booklet offers a Catholic and Marianist rationale, perspective, and orientation for assisting LGBTQ+ youth as they come to understand their sexuality. It outlines strategies for assuring that our institutions and ministries promote understanding, respect, and acceptance for all young people, regardless of their sexual orientation. The LGBTQ Initiative Team is actively promoting its use by Marianist high schools.

A Place at the Marianist Table

This is the Team’s signature two-hour program, giving witness and leading dialogue about the

experience of LGBTQ+ persons and family members in the context of their faith. The program has been presented to many Marianist lay and religious communities, as well as to staff at Marianist institutions. The Team is always available to facilitate this program with Marianist communities.



Retreat Weekends for LGBTQ+ Catholics

The LGBT Initiative Team has hosted yearly retreat weekends for LGBTQ+ Catholics since 2016. These faith-filled and affirming experiences provide personal and communal time, prayer, and conversation around our common journey of being LGBTQ+ Catholics. Family and friends are welcomed to participate. For many retreatants, it is an opportunity to feel accepted and welcomed in a Catholic community when perhaps they have not had that experience in the past.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What personal experience have you had of LGBTQ+ persons through work, family, or Church?
- How do you think Chaminade, Adèle, or Marie Thérèse would view this issue if they were alive today?
- Do you think the way LGBTQ+ people are treated in the Church is an issue of social justice? Why or why not?
- As Marianist Christians, what action might we commit to take (individually or as a community) to respond to this issue?



CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God, strengthen our hearts that we may offer welcome to people of all sexual orientations. Embolden us to work for social justice and extend care and friendship to those who feel that they are

outsiders. Bless us with every gift of the Spirit that we may act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with Christ all our days. Amen.

Additional Resources

Through this discussion guide and the links below, we hope you will learn valuable insights and find support regarding coming out, the role of faith and conscience, how to love LGBTQ+ children/family/friends, and ideas for making our world more accepting of LGBTQ+ persons. These links and resources are meant to provide additional information. Their inclusion here is not an endorsement of everything for which the organizations/creators stand.

Book List

Farley, Margaret (2006). *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc.

In this groundbreaking exploration of sexual ethics, Farley sheds new light on key issues: justice, personhood, the family, feminism, homosexuality, reproductive technology, and more.

Helminiak, Daniel (2000). *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*. New Mexico: Alamo Square Press

Helminiak quotes top scholars—such as Yale history professor John Boswell, New Testament professors L. William Countryman of Berkeley, and Robin Scroggs of Union Theological Seminary—to show that those who perceive Bible passages as condemning homosexuality are being misled by faulty translation and poor interpretation.

Firer Hinze, Christine and Hornbeck, J. Patrick (Editors) (2014). *More Than a Monologue: Sexual Diversity and the Catholic Church: Voices of Our Times*. New York: Fordham University Press



This distinctive publication, the first of two volumes that explores sexual diversity and the Catholic Church, seeks to begin a mutually enriching dialogue with the modern world by listening attentively to the “voices of our times.” The authors

have gathered an important set of these voices: the testimonies and reflections of Catholic and former Catholic LGBTQ+ persons, their friends, family members, and those who teach and accompany them.

Martin, James (2017). *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers

Father James Martin, a Jesuit priest, offers a two-way bridge as a means for us to repair and strengthen the bonds that unite all of us as God’s children. He calls on LGBTQ+ Catholics and the Church to come together to end the us-versus-them mentality. Turning to the Catechism, he draws on the three criteria at the heart of the Christian ministry—“respect, compassion, and sensitivity”—as a model for how the Catholic Church should relate to the LGBTQ+ community.

McNeill, John J. (1993). *The Church and the Homosexual*. Boston: Beacon Press

In this “brave and good book which shatters bad myths” (*Commonweal*), McNeill shows that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality, and he argues that the Church must not continue its homophobic practices.

Whitehead, Evelyn Eaton and Whitehead, James D. (2014). *Fruitful Embraces: Sexuality, Love, and Justice*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse

Sexuality and justice often seem odd bedfellows. Sexual embraces of intimacy and passion thrive in our private lives, while justice safeguards the laws and duties that govern the public realm. Yet intuitively, we sense there are deeper connections. Both sexuality and justice support the holistic ideal proclaimed by the early Christian writer Irenaeus: the glory of God is the human person fully alive.

General LGBT Information and Support Websites

Family Acceptance Project

(<https://familyproject.sfsu.edu>) Information about a research, intervention education, and policy initiative that works to prevent health and mental health risks for LGBTQ+ children and youth, including suicide, homelessness, and HIV—in the context of their families, cultures, and faith communities.

Fortunate Families

(<http://www.fortunatefamilies.com>) A Catholic family, friends, and allies ministry that supports LGBTQ+ sisters and brothers by facilitating respectful conversations with bishops, pastors, and Church leadership by sharing personal stories and establishing intentional Catholic LGBTQ+ Ministry sites in dioceses, parishes, educational institutions, and communities.

It Gets Better Project

(<http://www.itgetsbetter.org>) Many inspiring stories shared by LGBTQ+ persons are available on their website. There is also a Get Help page to find LGBTQ+ youth support services in your community.

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative LGBT Initiative

(<https://msjc.net/lgbt-initiative>) The Marianist Social Justice Collaborative's (MSJC) website has a page for the LGBT Initiative Team. This page has information about how the Team works to make the

Marianist Family and the larger community more welcoming and inclusive of LGBTQ+ persons.

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) (<http://www.pflag.org>)

PFLAG's website provides support, information, tools, and resources for LGBTQ+ persons and their families.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (1997). *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*. Publication No. 5-131. Available in print form for purchase. (<https://store.usccb.org/searchresults.asp?Search=Always+our+Children&Submit=Submit>)

Videos

The first link below is a series of TED Talks on transgender identity. The second link is "Beyond the Gender Binary," a TED Talk by Dr. Margaret Nichols, the director of the Institute for Personal Growth. (<https://www.ted.com/topics/transgender>)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MUIYlaWVUk&feature=youtu.be>)

Culturally Competent Care for LGBTQ Youth (www.sprc.org/video/lgbtq)

In this candid and compelling talk, The Trevor Project's Ashby Dodge examines some of the reasons why LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to attempt suicide than their straight peers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Related resources available at nacms.org include:

Things Marianist: How Do Marianists Do Social Justice?, Jim Vogt

The Marianist Founders and Social Justice, Felipe Melcher, SM

Introduction to Social Justice, William J. Ferree, SM

Marianist Charism and Our Life/Work Among the Poor, Joseph Jansen, SM

Marianist Community Meeting Kits are provided for the Marianist Family by the North American Center for Marianist Studies, NACMS. Additional kits, as well as other Marianist Studies resources, are available at <https://nacms.org/>.

