



What is life like if you or someone in your family is gay or lesbian in their sexual orientation? And what can your parish family do to make a difference?

“As a group that has suffered more than its share of oppression and contempt, the homosexual community has a particular claim on the concern of the church.” CBCEW Catholic Social Welfare Commission, 1979

“If someone who is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?” Pope Francis, July 2013

What is Life Like?

During Listening 2004 we heard that:

“The continual message from the church is that homosexuality is so, so dreadful. Our gay son just hasn’t stood a chance.”

“My brother is gay; the church has been very intolerant of him.”

At one diocesan family listening day, participants listened to the hurt experienced by a family as a result of prevailing attitudes towards homosexuality.

“Mr D discovered some years ago that his son was gay. He tried to talk to a fellow parishioner about his concern, but quickly realised from the extremely hostile, disparaging remarks made that this was not a good idea. The parish priest reacted in a similarly prejudiced way. Mr D’s wife chose to ignore the situation. Mr D feels angry, frustrated and totally rejected by the church. He now knows to follow his wife’s lead and keep quiet. There seems nowhere to turn. In his mind there is little hope for the future.”

And we also heard that:

“If we are to reach out to all, we must dare to hold out our hands. ...We must respond to people who are gay or lesbian. They should not feel marginalized.”

Challenges for the Parish

Being welcomed and participating in their local faith community is the foundation of spiritual support that the Church offers to baptised persons

with a homosexual inclination and their families. Parishes can take a number of steps to ensure that individuals and families feel welcome:

- Be aware of how marginalised some families facing these challenges feel within the Church. Form links with other parishes to share information and build networks of mutual support. Try to establish or promote support groups for parents and family members.
- Try not to assume everyone is heterosexual; reflect this in language and conversation. When speaking publicly, use the words "homosexual," "gay," and "lesbian" in honest and accurate ways. Avoid stereotyping and condemning. Do not presume that all homosexual persons are sexually active.
- Remember that homophobic jokes and asides can be cruel and hurtful; a careless word can mean another experience of rejection and pain.
- Establish what appropriate local help and support are available and make contact information easily accessible on notice boards and in leaflets.
- Enable the parish to be informed about Church teachings and Catholic writing on the subject. Keep copies of documents in the parish library.
- Check the local school policies on bullying and equality - children sometimes use the word 'gay' as a term of abuse.

Prayer and Liturgical Opportunities

It's always important to provide information about opportunities in the local area for moral and spiritual support for homosexual Catholics and their families.

Homilies and bidding prayers are excellent opportunities to demonstrate awareness and compassion and express appreciation for the gifts that homosexual Catholics bring to their faith community.

God of intimacy, you surround us with friends and family to cherish and to challenge. May we so give and receive caring in the details of our lives that we also remain faithful to your greater demands, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
(Janet Morley)

Heavenly Father, You made us in your own image, and in the life and death of Jesus, your Son, revealed your infinite love for all God's family. Help us to cherish the gift of sexuality and use our talents to affirm one another in the building of your kingdom. Amen.

Resources

There are a range of Church documents which describe the teaching of the Church and

address the pastoral care of homosexual persons:

Archbishop Vincent Nichols speaks about love and friendship (March 2012)
www.rcdow.org.uk/archbishop/default.asp?library_ref=35&content_ref=3725

Cherishing Life. Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. London: CTS, 2004
<http://www.cbcew.org.uk/content/download/34858/258882/file/cherishing-life-2004.pdf>

A Note Concerning the Teaching of the Catholic Church Concerning Homosexual People. Cardinal Basil Hume 1997. www.cbcew.org.uk/CBCEW-Media-Library/Archive-Media-Assets/Files/Department-of-Christian-Responsibility-and-Citizenship-files/Briefing-Papers/Homosexuality-a-note-on-the-teaching-of-the-Catholic-Church-by-Cardinal-Basil-Hume

Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers. USCCB 1997
www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/homosexuality/always-our-children.cfm

Outreach and Ministry to Homosexual Persons. Diocese of Westminster. February 2012 and 2007
http://www.rcdow.org.uk/diocese/default.asp?library_ref=4&content_ref=3699

An Introduction to the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People. CBCEW: Catholic Social Welfare Commission, 1979
www.everybodyswelcome.org.uk/docs/pastoralcare.pdf

In some dioceses a priest is appointed to take special responsibility for pastoral care of homosexual people. In other dioceses the marriage and family life ministry coordinator keep details of support services or help lines. Contact details of Diocesan Marriage and Family Life Coordinators are available at www.celebratingfamily.org.uk/familias_contacts.html

This leaflet is one of a series devised to assist parishes to become more welcoming, friendly and family-sensitive. For further information contact: Marriage and Family Life Project Office, 39 Eccleston Square, London, SW1V 1BX Email: elizabeth.davies@cbcew.org.uk