

**Pastoral Guidelines
for
Ministry to Homosexuals
in the Diocese of San Jose**
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1.0 Rationale	2.0 Pastoral Needs	3.0 Pastoral Response	4.0 Pastoral Resources
1.1 Pastoral in Character	2.1 "Pastoral"	3.1 Individuals	4.1 Continuing Education
1.2 Sexual Morality	2.2 "Special"	3.2 Families	4.2 "Pastoral Resources Committee"
1.3 Social Ethics	2.3 "Official"	3.3 Groups	4.3 Study Resources
1.4 Terminology		3.4 Sick and Dying	4.4 Organizations

1.0 Rationale

1.0 Users and readers of these guidelines are asked to keep a certain *rationale* in mind.

1.1 Pastoral in Character

1.1 The guidelines are *pastoral in character*, intended to help priests and parish ministers meet their obligation to serve kindly and conscientiously all who turn to the Church with real needs and honest hope. They do not presume any particular social or psychological analysis of sexuality in our society, except for a generally accepted premise that individuals do not choose and cannot change their sexual orientation but must understand it and integrate it into their life of faith and conscience.

1.2 Catholic Teaching: Sexual Morality

1.2 The guidelines accept, without elaborating, the perennial teaching of the Catholic Church on *sexual morality*, conscience, and personal sin. Deeper probing of the ground of this teaching and the contemporary challenges to it must be left to the educational efforts proposed in Section 4.1 of these guidelines.

1.3 Catholic Teaching: Social Ethics

1.3 The guidelines also accept the teaching of the Catholic Church on social ethics but do not propose a social action agenda. When the voice or action of the Church is needed in the religious or secular forum, appropriate agents of the parish and diocese will be informed and enlisted to uphold basic human and civil rights against social or legal discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or violence.

1.4 Terminology

1.4 The guidelines do not resolve the dilemma surrounding *terminology*. "Homosexual" seems clear and objective but has come to be regarded by some as too clinical and impersonal, with unwarranted implications of pathology, inferiority, or alienation. "Gay" and

"lesbian" are terms perceived by others as associated with political factions or particular lifestyles. These guidelines adopt "homosexual" without prejudice to any individuals or groups or to their right to call themselves "gay men" or "lesbian women."

2.0 Pastoral Needs

2.0 These guidelines have been prompted and guided by clear evidence of pastoral *needs* in the local Church for ministry to homosexuals that is genuinely "pastoral," "special" and "official."

2.1 "Pastoral" Ministry

2.1 The need for a "***pastoral***" ministry requires the embrace of the Church to be the same as that of Christ himself, open to all, excluding none. Hence it obligates the Church's ministers to respond without prejudice or condition to all who turn to the Church for support, counsel, reconciliation, solace or sacraments. All the baptized, regardless of sexual orientation or social attitudes, have an equal claim on this pastoral service.

2.2 "Special" Ministry

2.2 The need for a "***special***" ministry arises from widespread attitudes and actions in our society, and too often in our Church, that have made homosexual orientation the basis for discrimination and rejection or isolation of individuals and groups. This fact affects the needs of individuals and requires in ministers a special understanding, sensitivity, and skill in dealing with these social pressures and their impact on life and conscience.

2.3 "Official" Ministry

2.3 The need for a public, "***official***" ministry arises from the fact that social attitudes toward homosexual men and women are regularly deflected to those who minister to them, affirm their dignity, or uphold their rights. Hence the need for the formal and unequivocal support of the local bishop for this ministry, and adequate provision for training and supporting those who exercise it in the local Church.

3.0 Pastoral Response

3.0 The pastoral response to these needs is guided by the pastoral letter of the bishops of the United States ("To Live in Christ Jesus," 1976), who write: "Homosexuals, like everyone else, should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights. They have a right to respect, friendship, and justice. They should have an active role in Christian community" (n.52) Pastoral ministers are obligated and committed to securing these rights and roles, above all, within the Catholic community,

3.1 Ministry to Individuals

3.1 ***Ministry to individuals*** who are homosexual (whether or not they publicly disclose their orientation) is guided by that same pastoral letter, which emphasizes that sexual orientation in itself is not sinful, but that the basic moral norms of the Church apply to homosexual as well as to heterosexual acts. Pastoral ministers must uphold these norms which are rooted in sacred scripture, where we indeed find prohibition of heterosexual and homosexual behavior contrary to the Christian ideal. There also we find equally urgent and even more frequent condemnation, especially in the words and deeds of Jesus, of hatred, anger, refusal to forgive, and judgment or ostracism of entire segments of the community. In particular ministers will strive

(a) in pastoral counseling, to build up and not crush an individual's sense of dignity as a human person and responsibility as a Christian. Without this sense of self-worth and responsibility, ability to respond to Christ's call is severely hampered.

(b) in their teaching, to help each individual to form an honest and trustworthy conscience in accord with the Church's moral principles and norms. Every person's effort to understand, accept, and live by these norms is beset by difficulty, doubt, perplexity, and sometimes failure, but none of these absolves the minister from the obligation to receive each person with kindness and forbearance.

(c) in the sacrament of reconciliation and in all matters of conscience, to receive each with a presumption of good will, in the manner of Christ himself, that is, without reproach or recrimination, since the sacramental forum is above all a place of encounter with this same Christ.

(d) to welcome or seek out the alienated, who may be burdened with pain and anger which they perceive (perhaps with some justice) as caused or occasioned by the Church, its ministers or its members.

3.2 Ministry to Families

3.2 **Ministry to families** is equally urgent, when they must struggle with the dilemma of having a homosexual spouse, parent, brother or sister, son or daughter, These families have an equal right to counseling, support and reconciliation according to the provisions and intent of these guidelines.

3.3 Ministry to Groups

3.3 **Ministry to groups** is also necessary for those who feel a need for support to reduce their isolation and to foster the wholesome integration of their sexuality into their human and Christian growth. Ministry to these groups may take several forms:

(a) to provide opportunities and facilities for liturgy, prayer, study, or discussion for Catholics who are homosexual and who accept the Church's moral teaching and actively seek to assimilate it into their life of faith and conscience.

(b) to facilitate communication and dialogue among all such groups and between these groups and the Church in order to increase understanding and reduce divisions in the Church and in the community.

(c) to exercise pastoral prudence in separating this ministry from identification or association with the aims or actions of groups who may partially share the aims of the Church but also advocate legal or social provisions contrary to Christian moral or social principles.

3.4 Ministry to the Sick, Dying

3.4 **Ministry to the sick, dying**, and bereaved requires special attention and sensitivity in this context because the misunderstanding and hostility surrounding homosexuality has been grievously aggravated by the uncertainty and fear surrounding Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Afflicted individuals, their families, and friends have a special claim on the ministry of the Church.

4.0 Pastoral Resources

4.0 To implement these guidelines **pastoral resources** will be made available. Pastoral ministers will need continuing education, consultation, and support; some must be qualified and available to meet the specific needs of individuals and groups and to be a resource to other ministers.

4.1 Programs of Continuing Education

4.1 This ministry requires at least three programs of continuing education:

- (a) basic pastoral formation of parish ministers;
- (b) recruitment of special ministers to offer assistance to individuals and groups, or to other ministers;
- (c) information and education for the Catholic and non-Catholic community about the Church's teaching on sexuality and about its ministry to homosexual men and women.

4.2 "Pastoral Resource Committee"

4.2 The bishop will appoint the chair and members of a "**Pastoral Resource Committee**" for ministry to homosexual men and women, comprising not fewer than seven nor more than fifteen members, qualified and experienced in the pastoral and professional areas required by this ministry. The Committee will establish its own organization and procedures to address its principal tasks:

- (a) to inform and advise the bishop on all aspects of this ministry;
- (b) to enlist the interest and cooperation of diocesan agencies in implementing these guidelines;
- (c) to recommend, promote, or provide, in consultation with these agencies, programs of education and information.

4.3 Study Resources

4.3 The Pastoral Resource Committee will regularly evaluate and recommend publications to support these education programs or the personal **study resources** for pastoral ministers.

4.4 Organizations

4.4 The Pastoral Resource Committee will evaluate, in accord with these guidelines (cf. 3.3 above) **organizations** to be served, consulted, or enlisted in this ministry.

Pastoral Resource Committee

The Pastoral Resource Committee meets monthly at the Offices of the Diocese of San Jose.

To contact Members of the Committee, to volunteer service on its sub-committees and to seek assistance relative to this ministry, please contact the Office of Pastoral Ministry (408) 983-0122.
