



STORIES OF COURAGE – CHAPTER II

"Hope has two beautiful daughters – their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are."

St. Augustine

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE HIERARCHY OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH REGARDING THE PASTORAL CARE OF GAY AND LESBIAN PERSONS

As Catholic pastors, we have become increasingly disturbed by the tone and, in some cases, content of documents and statements from the Vatican, bishops' conferences and individual bishops on issues categorized under the heading of 'homosexual' or 'gay/lesbian.' We respect the teaching authority of the Church. Because of this, we find particularly troubling the increase in the use of violent and abusive language directed at any human person. Such language is inappropriate.

This is especially so when addressing members of the community of the faithful.

These divisive and exclusionary statements from the Church are contrary to sound pastoral practice. The life journey in faith is unique and sacred, including the personal integration of sexuality and spirituality. Condemnations leveled at sincere Catholics attempting to make sense out of their journey are inappropriate and pastorally destructive.

As priests and pastors we are speaking out to make clear that our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters are all members of God's family, brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus and deserving of the same dignity and respect owed any human being.

Recognition of the inalienable dignity of the human person is the only path toward justice and reconciliation. We affirm the goodness of all homosexual persons. We root ourselves in the U.S. Bishops' statement, "Always Our Children." Additionally, we re-affirm the understanding of the goodness of the human person as put forth throughout the papacy of Pope John Paul II.

Further, we want to state clearly that ministering to and with our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters is mutually beneficial, as is all ministerial activity. Pre-judging where any believer's journey will take them is inappropriate. Walking with them, as we do with our heterosexual brothers and sisters, is the appropriate Christian response.

In the recent past, individual bishops, bishops' conferences and the Vatican have assumed a tone of such violence and abusiveness toward these sons and daughters of the Church, we can no longer remain silent. Has any other group of people within the Body of Christ been so assaulted and violated by such mean-spirited language?

Examples from the most recent Vatican document show all too clearly the demonization of these children of God, referring to homosexuality as a "troubling moral and social phenomenon," "a serious depravity," "the spread of the phenomenon," "approval or legalization of evil," "grave detriment to the common good," "harmful to the proper development of human society," "intrinsically disordered." Does anyone consider this vile and toxic language invitational?

For many gay and lesbian Catholics, this most recent series of attacks has forced them, out of self-respect and self-love, to withdraw from active participation in the Church and question how they can remain members of a Church they experience as

abusive. It is not possible to minister to and with the needs of our homosexual brothers and sisters with language of this tone as a foundation. The Catholic Church is most catholic when it is inclusive and embracing, and least reflective of the gospel of Jesus when it is exclusive and rigid. For this reason, we also want to affirm the many pastoral and positive statements by certain bishops and bishops' conferences (e.g. "Always Our Children").

The Church's theology, including her moral teaching, is always in dialogue with the broader lived experience of her members, which shapes and rearticulates the ancient deposit of faith. We encourage a new atmosphere of openness to dialogue which includes the lived experience of many Catholic members. We recognize the blessings of countless homosexuals in a variety of relationships. We believe their experiences must be listened to respectfully.

While we do not know the reasons for the increasingly violent and abusive language, we deplore it as ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ and ask that it stop immediately. Furthermore, we request that all those in official positions of teaching authority in the Church refrain from any more statements directed AT the gay and lesbian members of the Body of Christ, and instead begin an earnest dialogue WITH those same members of the Body of Christ.

For our part, we pledge to treat all who seek to continue their faith journey with us with respect and dignity, regardless of their sexual orientation. We join the countless men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, who seek justice, mercy and compassion in and through the Catholic Church. We extend an invitation to all who share our concern to duplicate this letter, sign it, and send it to their pastor, local bishop, National Bishops' Conference or the Vatican.

(Parish names are listed for identification purposes only.)

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