



Diocese of Saginaw

# Questions and Answers about LGBTQ+ and Gender Identity that Catholic Educators, Catechists and Youth Ministers may Find Helpful

**A key foundation for any discussion about these issues from a Catholic perspective is the Church’s teaching that every human being is a beloved child of God called by grace to be a living temple of the Holy Spirit. The Catholic Church insists, therefore, that the sacred dignity of each human person should be respected and honored, without exception.**

*Please note:* This document should be considered a living document, subject to updates. The information below is not meant to be comprehensive but is intended to assist those involved in the formation of young people in responding to questions about LGBTQ+ and Gender Identity in a way that is faithful to the teachings and pastoral approach of the Catholic Church – keeping in mind the need to answer in age-appropriate ways. All who serve as teachers or formators in Catholic schools and parishes have the ministerial obligation to uphold the official teachings of the Catholic Church.

Rather than only being reactive, religion teachers and catechists in higher grades – as well as youth ministers – may consider being proactive by discussing a “Question of the Week” regarding the Catholic Faith. The questions below can be incorporated into this kind of approach, which is often called “the Socratic method” – encouraging students/participants to discuss questions and think things through in a deep way with guidance from the teacher/facilitator, while exploring the underlying beliefs that shape their views. **This document concludes with a list of additional resources, which you may find useful.**

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## “Building block” definitions and clarifications

There are some key definitions and several clarifications that help foster a fruitful conversation about the topics of LGBTQ+ and Gender Identity:

### **1. What is love?**

In response to this question, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 1766 quotes St. Thomas Aquinas: "To love is to will the good of another." Love is therefore not about feelings, though feelings may accompany the act of willing the good of another. What does Aquinas mean by “the good”? He explains that the moral good consists in ordering our free actions to conform with reason. God also reveals “the good” through the life, teachings and witness of Jesus who is “Goodness incarnate.” And in his mercy, God also shows us what is “the good” through his commandments and the official teachings of his Church, neither of which can ever contradict human reason.

Jesus demonstrates how willing the good of others often means making a gift of ourselves on their behalf. The bible states that there is “no greater love” than the love Jesus showed by laying down his life on the cross to save us (Jn 13:15). The Lord calls us to love others in a similar way. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, we cannot find ourselves “except through a sincere gift of self” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 24).

Example: A child with a peanut allergy really wants to eat the Snickers bar someone put in her plastic Halloween pumpkin. Willing the good of the child, the parent takes this candy away and then has to put up with a temper tantrum. Even though this was an act of love, both the child and the parent experience very unpleasant feelings when the child is not allowed to eat the Snickers bar.

Question: Without revealing any details that should remain confidential, can you think of a time in your life when you chose to do something good for another person out of love, even though it did not feel good to do so? Or a time when your parent(s) lovingly chose to do something for your own good even though it did not feel good for you or for them?

Further study: [“LOVE IS BOTH TOLERANT AND INTOLERANT”](https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/article/love-is-both-tolerant-and-intolerant/5410/) by Bishop Robert Barron

### **2. What is truth?**

Logical truth is the conformity of the mind to reality. “A judgment is said to be true when it conforms to the external reality” (St. Thomas Aquinas). Our current Western culture, however, has more and more chosen to follow philosophers like Immanuel Kant who reject this objective definition of truth in favor of Subjectivism -- a philosophy which essentially says that reality and truth are what my mind says they are.

Example: Imagine that a 6’3” white male – a former linebacker – introduces himself as a 5’1” Asian woman. How would most people respond to this individual’s description of himself? Following the subjectivist viewpoint (see above), our western culture now says that we must accept the man’s assertion about himself, even though our eyes and minds tell us something very different.

In the name of tolerance, we are increasingly expected to accept this person's mental view of himself as true and real. So how should Catholics respond when there is a discrepancy between a person's gender or physical characteristics and that person's own self-description? As followers of Jesus, we are always called to love and respect the person, but never to accept what is untrue.

Activity: Discuss Archbishop Fulton Sheen's insight that we need to be tolerant of persons, but not of untruth. What concretely might this mean for our interactions with other people as 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians?

Further study: "The Pillars of Unbelief—Kant"

[https://www.peterkreeft.com/topics-more/pillars\\_kant.htm](https://www.peterkreeft.com/topics-more/pillars_kant.htm)

### **3. What is freedom?**

In the list of values that are most important in life, many Americans would likely put "freedom" at or near the top. The Catholic Church agrees that freedom is not only important -- it is a precious gift from God: "Man is rational and therefore like God; he is created with free will and is master over his acts" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 1730). "Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 1731).

In the Catholic view, however, the use of our freedom is only good if it is at the service of what is good and true. "Freedom attains perfection in its acts when directed toward God, the sovereign Good" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 1744). "The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just. The choice to disobey and do evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to 'the slavery of sin'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 1733).

Ultimately, we are called to use God's gift of freedom to serve the highest value – love. Love is the highest value both in this life and in heaven, which Pope Pius VI calls "the country of pure love." Love, after all, is God's very essence, as Sacred Scripture so powerfully proclaims: "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8).

Prayer experience: "By the working of grace the Holy Spirit educates us in spiritual freedom in order to make us free collaborators in his work in the Church and in the world" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 1742). We need God's grace to use the gift of freedom well. Let us pray together this prayer from the Mass:

Almighty and merciful God,  
in your goodness take away from us all that is harmful,  
so that, made ready both in mind and body,  
we may freely accomplish your will.  
(Roman Missal, 32nd Sunday, Opening Prayer)

### **4. What's the difference between God's gift of human judgment and the sin of judgmentalism?**

Making a judgment can easily be confused with being judgmental, but they are two different things. The ability to make judgments is a precious gift from God which we depend on all the time. For example, we judge that it is not safe to cross the street, or we judge that smoking and vaping are not healthy choices. As Catholics, we believe that the Church has the gift of authority from God to make judgements about what is morally good and what is not (cf. Mt 16:19: "Whatever

you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”). For instance, the Church judges and teaches that sexual activity outside of a valid “husband-wife” marriage is not morally good. (See the Resources page for a link to an FAQ which explains what the Catholic Church means by a “valid marriage.”)

At the same time, the Church warns us that it is immoral to be judgmental toward others. Judgmental people actually misuse the gift of judgment by trying to declare something negative about the interior or spiritual state of another person, or about their intentions. This is a sin against both our neighbor and against God. Only God truly knows what is in each person’s heart. Thus, when we are judgmental toward others, we are in a sense trying to “play God.”

## **5. What does the Catholic Church teach about the human person?**

**The Human Person:** “Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 357).

**Personal Dignity:** “The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 1700). At conception, God creates in each human being a spiritual soul with both an intellect and a will. Our intellects and wills allow us to freely make thoughtful choices in life and, with the help of grace, to love as God loves (cf. Mt 5:43-48). Our intellects and wills reflect the divine intelligence and the divine will. This is true of all human beings, regardless of a person’s level of cognitive ability.

**Personal Identity:** “Christians have become ‘children of God,’ ‘partakers of the divine nature.’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 1692). In other words, by being grafted into Christ through the sacrament of baptism (cf. Jn 15:1-8), we truly become “sons in the Son” and “daughters in the Son” and thereby participate in the supernatural life of the Holy Trinity.

**The Equality of Persons:** Man and woman have been created, which is to say, willed by God: on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other, in their respective beings as man and woman. ‘Being man’ or ‘being woman’ is a reality which is good and willed by God: man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their Creator. Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity ‘in the image of God.’ In their ‘being-man’ and ‘being-woman,’ they reflect the Creator’s wisdom and goodness (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 369).

**The Destiny of the Human Person:** “Endowed with a spiritual soul, with intellect and with free will, the human person is from his very conception ordered to God and destined for eternal beatitude. He pursues his perfection in ‘seeking and loving what is true and good’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 1711). As St. Augustine writes in his *Confessions*, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

*The following “Questions and Answers” are designed to assist employees and volunteers at Catholic schools and parishes with the weighty responsibility of upholding what the Catholic Church officially teaches, and to equip them to be able to share the beautiful “why” behind these teachings – all of which are at the service of authentic, Christ-like love.*

## Questions Regarding Same-sex Attraction and Catholic Teaching

*Note: This document will occasionally use “SSA” as an abbreviation for “same-sex attraction.” See number 7 in the following section for a clarification about this terminology.*

### **1. What is the position of the Catholic Church on people who self-identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual?**

Answer: Christ the Redeemer founded the Catholic Church and, just like Jesus, the Church desires every human person to find true joy and holiness in this life...and eternal happiness in heaven. This includes all people, including those who feel attracted to the same sex. We are all beloved children of God, created in his image and likeness.

### **2. Then how can we say the Church is being loving when marriage between people of the same gender is not allowed? “Love is love” as the saying goes... And after all, the Bible teaches that God is love (1 Jn 4:16) – and Jesus himself tells us to love one another (Jn 13:34).**

Answer: Love is more than a feeling. The Catholic Church teaches that love means “willing the good of another person” – that is, wanting what is truly good for him or her. (For example, we can think of how schools put filters on classroom computers – to prevent students from being exposed to harmful content or internet predators. Or we can think of parents who ask their children not to take their cell phone into their bedroom so they can get a good night’s rest.)

The Church holds that allowing people of the same sex to get married would be unloving, since it would go against God’s plan for the human beings he has created. God has revealed a game plan for marriage which the Church does not believe it can or should change – namely, that marriage is only between one man and one woman. The Church also accepts God’s plan for human sexual activity, teaching that it is only allowed within the context of a marriage between a husband and a wife. Feelings of romantic or sexual attraction can be very strong, but when we look at a husband and wife who have been married 50 years, for example, we sense a love that is much deeper than just feelings.

Activity: The first moments of this short video from the Augustine Institute compare the pleasurable feelings of romantic love to an exciting brook with water spraying here and there -- but how a deep married love is more powerful, like the Mississippi River: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbfbumWI80o>

### **3. Is experiencing attraction to a person of the same sex sinful?**

No. Whether a person is attracted to the same or the opposite sex – experiencing an attraction does not mean a person has sinned. Sin would only occur if someone lusted over another person, or if they engaged in sexual activity with another person outside of a valid marriage between a husband and a wife. The Church makes the careful distinction between those who experience an attraction

to someone of the same sex (which is not a sin) and those who choose to act on the attraction through sexual activity (which is a sin), either occasionally or as part of an ongoing, active lifestyle.

#### **4. Why is the Church so concerned about sex? Doesn't the Church seem to be "anti-sex" with so many rules about sexual morality?**

In reality, the Church is so appreciative of God's gift of human sexuality that sex is not only considered good – it is considered holy. And this is why the Church wants us to follow God's plan for the gift of human sexuality, reserving sexual activity for a valid marriage between a husband and a wife. If there is a God-given game plan for the use of our sexuality, then it should not be surprising that there are some rules that the Catholic Church upholds. Rules can actually be a good thing, like in sports. For example, if there were not a rule prohibiting tackling in basketball, we would never have gotten to see LeBron James soar through the air. We can also call to mind the stop signs on our roads, which help keep people safe. Or we can think of a world-class piano player who follows the notes and rules on a sheet of music to play the Moonlight Sonata by Beethoven – compared to a 3-year-old who randomly pounds on the piano keys. Rules should serve what is authentically good and true and beautiful, and the Catholic Church believes that the rules about human sexuality and marriage that God has given us through the bible, Sacred Tradition and the natural law are for our good – and for our true happiness. Note: Sacred Tradition refers to what God has revealed in Christ that was not written down in the bible and which the Catholic Church safeguards. Natural law refers to the God-given law that "is written and engraved in the soul of each and every man, because it is human reason ordaining him to do good and forbidding him to sin" (Pope Leo XII).

With almost 2000 years of God-given wisdom, the Church looks with compassion on people (including members of the LGBTQ+ community) who buy into what has been called the "hook-up" culture, and then tend to experience a strong sense of emptiness and even depression. In his encyclical letter on care for our common home (*Laudato Si'*), Pope Francis explores how the current "use and throw away" mentality negatively impacts our world – and we can certainly apply his insights to human sexuality. For example, it is not uncommon for unmarried women (both young and old) to wonder why a male who initially showed so much interest in her then loses interest in her once they engage in sex outside of marriage. As Pope Francis notes in *Joy of the Gospel* no. 53, in these times "human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a 'throw away' culture which is now spreading." The

"Theology of the Body" of St. John Paul II, on the other hand, offers a beautiful and inspiring vision of human sexuality that can heal and transform our current culture. (See the Resources page at the end of this document for some noteworthy books on the "Theology of the Body.")

#### **5. Isn't the Church guilty of being unfair to people who experience same-sex attraction?**

Just like in other groups and organizations, there are individual Catholics who fail to show people who experience same-sex attraction the love they deserve. The official stance of the Catholic Church, however, insists on the need to show respect and love to members of the LGBTQ+ community. As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states: "All people are created in the image and likeness of God and thus possess an innate human dignity that must be acknowledged and respected.... 'It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs.'" [And from the lay faithful, as well.] Therefore, the Catholic

Church is arguably the largest organization on the planet that stands up against the ill treatment of people who experience SSA.

**6. “I have a friend/relative/family member who is a member of the LGBTQ+ community. I know what the Church teaches about gay relationships. Does that mean I can’t hang out with them? Are they condemned by God and the Church? How can I support and love them – and still be true to what our Catholic Faith teaches?”**

The Church calls us to love every human being authentically, including members of the LGBTQ+ community. While we cannot affirm or endorse a lifestyle or relationship that includes sexual activity outside of a valid “husband-wife” marriage, we should still follow Jesus’ example of loving and spending time with our friends and family members who identify as belonging to the LGBTQ+ community.

Friendships with heterosexual women and men are a great gift for people who experience SSA. The philosopher, Aristotle, recognized that there is a form of friendship based on utility (connected with something we get from another person, such as our friendship with a hairdresser or barber). There is also friendship based on pleasure (not sexual pleasure, but pleasure based on common interests such as movies or sports). For Aristotle, however, the highest form of friendship is a “friendship of virtue” in which friends look for each other’s good and help one another lead a good and moral life. The Church raises the bar even higher, and would say that the greatest friends are ones who help us grow in holiness, as we see in the friendship between St. Clare and St. Francis of Assisi, or between St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Francis Xavier. The Book of Sirach 6:14-16 sums up the value of friendship in this way:

A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter:  
he that has found one has found a treasure.  
There is nothing so precious as a faithful friend,  
and no scales can measure his excellence.  
A faithful friend is an elixir of life;  
and those who fear the Lord will find him.

**7. Why does the Church often use the term “same-sex attraction” (SSA) rather than “gay” or lesbian”?**

The Church recognizes that a number of individuals have deep-seated attractions to the same sex, and that many of them have unfortunately felt marginalized by society and the Church. While some individuals choose to identify as “gay” or “lesbian,” other Christians who experience SSA are not comfortable with these terms, since the terms can imply that sexual orientation defines a person’s core identity. While sexuality is an important part of who we are, at the deepest level of our identity we are beloved children of God, created in his likeness and image...and we are all offered the wonderful gift of redemption that Jesus won for us through his passion, death and resurrection.

When Mother Teresa of Calcutta opened New York City’s first hospice for AIDS patients, the saint refrained from calling people “homosexual” but instead preferred to call them “friends of Jesus,” since she viewed this as reflecting their deepest identity. Her ministry to AIDS patients is also an example of how the Catholic Church reaches out to serve and meet the needs of all people, even if the Church does not agree with the lifestyle or moral choices of a particular individual.

**From a pastoral standpoint, if persons we encounter prefer using familiar terms such as “gay” or “lesbian,” we should avoid insisting on the term “same-sex attraction.” Kindly respecting their preferences can remove a potential barrier to lovingly accompanying them.**

**8. Someone comes to you asking about a family member who experiences same-sex attraction and mentions that he or she “was born this way.” If God “made him or her this way,” who are we to say that it is wrong to act on these attractions?**

The Catholic Church admits that the genesis of SSA remains largely unexplained (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 2357). Is it nature? Is it nurture? Is it a combination? Scientific studies have not been conclusive regarding any evidence of a genetic component. However, Church teaching is not based on these factors. There are two important things to consider.

First, we need to distinguish between a predetermination and a predisposition. For example, there are genetic factors contributing to obesity. This means there can be a predisposition to obesity, but that is not the same thing as a pre-determination. One is called to resist acting out on this predisposition, and instead find ways to eat properly and exercise, etc., consulting one’s doctor. We would never say to someone with this genetic predisposition that “this is who they are.” We would help them to live the healthiest life they can without expressing any type of rejection or judgmentalism toward them. Note: In her teachings, the Catholic Church has never officially endorsed any kind of “conversion therapy” that would attempt to eliminate the attraction that some people experience towards the same sex. These individuals are, and always will be, beloved children of God – and if they are baptized, they are true members of the Body of Christ just the way they are.

Second, there are numerous conditions one could be born with. For example, someone could be born blind or deaf. This does not mean being blind or deaf is just “another way” of seeing or hearing. Something is not present – namely, the ability to see or to hear. This is a hardship which calls us to offer compassion and, as much as possible, loving accompaniment. Likewise, for those who experience same-sex attraction, there is something not present – namely, the exclusive attraction to the opposite sex which is the experience of most people and which, in God’s plan, is the starting point that can lead to marriage between a husband and wife...and often to the gift of children. The hardship of individuals who experience SSA also calls us to extend not just compassion but, as mentioned above, genuine friendship.

**9. After a class or a faith formation gathering, a young person confidentially asks: “What should I do...I’m feeling attracted to someone of the same sex?” Here are some suggested responses:**

“Thank you for opening up about what you are experiencing. It is not easy to take a step like that.”

Invite the young person to share the questions that are on their heart and any fears they may be experiencing.

Encourage the young person not to be too quick to place labels on themselves, especially since our feelings can sometimes come and go...

Offer assurance that experiencing these feelings is not sinful – nor do they mean that Jesus or the Church will ever cease loving them because of these feelings.



Reassure the young person that, in God’s eyes, she or he is a beloved child of God no matter what feelings may come or go within them. And reassure them that they are not alone.

Ask: “Have you spoken to your parent(s) or guardian(s) about what you are experiencing?”

(If they say they are finding it hard to approach the parent(s) or guardian(s) about getting help navigating these feelings then – if you are comfortable doing so – you might offer to sit with the young person when they meet with their parent(s) or guardian(s). This is only an option, however, not a requirement.)

“Thank you again for sharing what you are experiencing. I am blessed by your trust in me. I may not have all the answers, but I’m always here to listen.”

If you are comfortable taking a further step, you could also ask: “Would it be okay with you if I reached out, confidentially and anonymously, to someone with more experience about some of the questions you have?”

### **Important Note Regarding the Welfare of a Student/Child**

- a) **If you judge that the situation is potentially an emergency, immediately call 911.**
- b) If you believe that the young person is a victim of neglect or abuse at home, immediately call 855-444-3911 to reach Children's Protective Services (CPS).
- c) If you believe the safety, health, or well-being of the young person could be at risk, you should immediately contact the parent(s) or guardian(s) -- as well as the principal or the pastor/director of parish life, depending on whether you serve in a school or parish setting.

## Questions regarding Gender Identity, Transgenderism and Catholic Teaching

### **1. Aren’t we free to determine what is true for ourselves, especially about our own gender?**

A transgender person is one whose sense of personal gender is different from their God-given gender. (It is not precise to say “their gender at birth,” since with a prenatal blood test, parents can find out their baby's gender as early as 11 weeks into pregnancy). While showing pastoral concern and compassion for people who experience confusion about their own gender (“gender dysphoria”), the Church calls everyone to recognize and receive their God-given gender and not seek to medically “transition” to the opposite sex. “Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 2333).

### **2. What does the Church have to say about gender identity?**

Gender identity has to do with a person’s own subjective sense of being male, female, a blend of both, or neither – independent of the gender God gave them. For example, a man might feel like he is a woman inside, and vice versa. The Church calls for pastoral sensitivity to such individuals, but teaches that it is not morally permissible for such a person to undergo medical procedures to alter the bodily gender God gave them. While the Church approves and appreciates the way medical experts have used their God-given gifts of intelligence and creativity to develop medical

procedures like lung transplants and appendectomies, the Church prohibits procedures which attempt to physically alter the appearance of one's biological gender. As Pope Francis states in *Amoris Laetitia*: "Let us not fall into the sin of trying to replace the Creator. We are creatures, and not omnipotent. Creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift. At the same time, we are called to protect our humanity, and this means, in the first place, accepting it and respecting it as it was created."

### **3. How does sexual orientation differ from gender identity?**

Sexual orientation indicates the gender that a person feels attracted to. A person can also experience attractions to both men and women at the same time, identifying themselves as having a sexual orientation which is bisexual. Again, the Church emphasizes that there is no sin in having an attraction towards one gender or the other. We only sin if we consent to lust after a person or act on those attractions in a sexual manner outside of a valid marriage between a wife and a husband.

### **4. "My cousin came out as nonbinary. They said that if I don't use their preferred pronouns that I am discriminating against or hurting them. What should I do?"**

According to healthline.com, the term 'nonbinary' "can mean different things to different people. At its core, it's used to describe someone whose gender identity isn't exclusively male or female. If someone tells you they're nonbinary, it's always important to ask what being nonbinary means to them. Some people who are nonbinary experience their gender as both male and female, and others experience their gender as neither male nor female."

While we are called to offer kindness and compassion to someone who identifies as "nonbinary," Catholics should avoid using pronouns that are not in accord with the gender that God originally gave the person, since this practice would be supporting an untruth. As Archbishop Fulton Sheen taught, we are called to be tolerant of persons, but not of untruth. One option to consider is simply to avoid pronouns by using the actual name of the person when speaking to them or about them.

### **5. God created us to be free, so what is wrong with a person deciding that the gender God gave them is not his/her correct gender?**

Human freedom is a gift from God, but it is not the highest value in creation. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the greatest human value is the virtue of love. And authentic love means willing the good of another person. God gave each of us the gift of a will that can choose freely, but in God's plan, our freedom is meant to be at the service of love. With regard to gender, accepting the maleness or femaleness that God gave us in the womb is what God and the Church calls us to. As Pope Francis observes in *Laudato Si'* no. 155: "The acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it."

Activity: Read this article on love by Dr. Peter Kreeft: <https://peterkreeft.com/topics/love.htm>

Discussion question 1: How does *agape* love differ from the other three kinds of love?

Discussion question 2: How have I experienced *agape* love in my own life (giving an example)?

**6. “I am a person who is struggling with my own gender identity. Am I ‘broken’ in some way?”**

The truth is that, this side of heaven, we are all broken. We all struggle. The good news is that Jesus offers all of us strength and healing. Over and over, each of us needs to recall the words of Pope Francis from *Joy of the Gospel* no. 164: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.”

As Catholics, we are blessed to be able to receive his mercy and strength in the sacrament of Reconciliation and by worthily receiving him in Holy Communion. The Church also recognizes the value of professional counseling and therapy, provided that the professional be qualified and not antagonistic to the role of the client’s Catholic faith in their journey towards healing.

**7. People are now having operations and undergoing treatments to change from being a woman to a man and vice versa. Shouldn’t we support them as long as it makes them happy?**

We are called to want people’s true good and happiness. Since medically changing/altering one’s body to simulate a different gender is morally prohibited by God and the Church, it would be unloving to support a person’s desire or decision to undergo such procedures.

At the same time, we should avoid any sign of condemning them. They deserve our love and compassion, and the healing which Christ alone can offer. To offer an example, people who suffer from anorexia are experiencing a disconnect between how they view their body and how it is in reality. It would not be right to perform weight loss surgery because they are identifying as overweight, nor would it be showing love if we confirmed them in their belief.

**8. After class, a student confidentially asks: “What should I do...I’m feeling as though my true gender is different from the one I was born with?”**

Here are some suggested responses:

“Thank you for opening up about what you are experiencing. It is not easy to take a step like that.”

Invite the young person to share the questions that are on their heart and any fears they may be experiencing.

Encourage the young person not to be too quick to place labels on themselves, especially since our feelings can sometimes come and go...

Offer assurance that experiencing these feelings is not sinful – nor do they mean that Jesus or the Church will ever cease loving them because of these feelings.

Reassure the young person that, in God’s eyes, she or he is a beloved child of God no matter what feelings may come or go within them. And reassure them that they are not alone.

**Consider gently sharing how gender stereotypes can sometimes create unnecessary confusion. (A boy who likes what has been traditionally called “girl things” is still a boy, and a girl who likes “boy things” is still a girl.)**

Ask: “Have you spoken to your parent(s) or guardian(s) about what you are experiencing?”  
(If they say they are finding it hard to approach their parent(s) or guardian(s) about getting help navigating these feelings then – if you are comfortable doing so – you might offer to sit with the young person when they meet with their parent(s) or guardian(s). This is only an option, however, not a requirement.)

“Thank you again for sharing what you are experiencing. I am blessed by your trust in me. I may not have all the answers, but I’m always here to listen.”

If you are comfortable taking a further step, you could also ask: “Would it be okay with you if I reached out, confidentially and anonymously, to someone with more experience about some of the questions you have?”

Again, as a reminder:

- a) **If you judge that the situation is potentially an emergency, immediately call 911.**
- b) If you believe that the young person is a victim of neglect or abuse at home, immediately call 855-444-3911 to reach Children's Protective Services (CPS).
- c) If you believe the safety, health, or well-being of the young person could be at risk, you should immediately contact the parent(s) or guardian(s) -- as well as the principal or the pastor/director of parish life, depending on whether you serve in a school or parish setting.

## Conclusion: Some Questions to Reflect On

- 1. What concretely does it mean to offer real friendship to someone experiencing same-sex attraction or to a person who feels confused about their gender? Give some examples...**
- 2. Given the key difference between making a judgment and being judgmental, what do you think is the meaning of Pope Francis’ famous statement regarding people who are attracted to the same sex: “Who am I to judge?”**
- 3. When do we see Jesus showing genuine love and even friendship to people who had been making poor choices in life or who – often through no fault of their own – felt that they had been pushed away as “outsiders” or “outcasts”? Find examples in the four Gospels.**

## APPENDIX A

### The Mystery of Suffering

Someone who experiences gender dysphoria can understandably ask: “If God is all-loving, why would he permit this difficult cross in my life?” Or if a person experiences feelings of attraction towards someone of the same sex, she or he might ask: “Why would a loving God permit me to experience these attractions if his plan for me is that I never act on these feelings in a sexual way?” Heartfelt questions like these deserve our deep compassion, and they connect with one of the most difficult “big” questions in life: “Why does an all-powerful and loving God permit suffering in this life?” There is no easy answer, and we should not try to pretend we can read the mind of God. As Peter Kreeft notes in his reflection on the mystery of suffering, oftentimes the best we can do is to gaze at Jesus on the Cross. Jesus is God, and he freely chose to not only suffer **for** us – he also chose to suffer **with** us in profound solidarity with our experiences of pain and distress.

#### Excerpts from *God's Answer to Suffering* by Dr. Peter Kreeft

“The answer [to the question of why God allows us to suffer] must be someone, not just something. For the problem (suffering) is about someone (God – why does he... why doesn't he ...?) rather than just something. To question God's goodness is not just an intellectual experiment. It is rebellion or tears. It is a little child with tears in its eyes looking up at Daddy and weeping, ‘Why?’ This is not merely the philosophers' ‘why?’ Not only does it add the emotion of tears but also it is asked in the context of relationship. It is a question put to the Father, not a question asked in a vacuum. The hurt child needs not so much explanations as reassurances. And that is what we get: the reassurance of the Father in the person of Jesus, “he who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). The answer is not just a word but the Word; not an idea but a person.

“. . . Let's step back a bit. We began with the mystery, not just of suffering but of suffering in a world supposedly created by a loving God. How to get God off the hook? God's answer is Jesus. Jesus is not God off the hook but God on the hook. That's why the doctrine of the divinity of Christ is crucial: If that is not God there on the cross but only a good man, then God is not on the hook, on the cross, in our suffering. And if God is not on the hook, then God is not off the hook. How could he sit there in heaven and ignore our tears? ...God himself has answered this objection not in words but in deeds and in tears. Jesus is the tears of God.”

For the full text, visit: <https://www.peterkreeft.com/topics/suffering.htm>

## APPENDIX B

### Catholic Teaching on Same-sex Attraction

by Dr. Dan Osborn, Diocese of Saginaw

Imagine St. Peter's Square packed with visitors as the pope declares that someone who openly experienced same-sex attraction is now a saint of the Catholic Church. This is not a pipe dream, and in many ways it would be a blessing if this could actually happen in our lifetimes.

This canonization scenario comes to mind when reading a reflection by (then) 22-year-old Avera Maria Santo in her 2018 open letter to Catholic bishops: "I used to want to be in a same-sex relationship. The desire was overwhelming at times, to the point where I could see no other way to get through the day. But I know now, from the good and gracious teachings of God through his Church, that such a relationship hinders not only my freedom to love authentically, but also my ability to achieve holiness. Taking it a step further, being in such a relationship could ultimately block me from spending my eternity with my one true love, Jesus. My dear bishops, there is no one on this earth that isn't called to a life of chastity; that includes my brothers and sisters who experience same-sex attractions. This is not because the Church is oppressive and wants us to be miserable and passively submissive to her, but because each and every one of us is invited to enter into the divine life of our Creator, a life where no sin can remain."

The reality is that women who are attracted to women – and men who are attracted to men – have just as much of an opportunity to attain holiness as any other children of God. According to Catholic teaching, the path to holiness is essentially the same for all people: to do God's will with generous love and lead a life of profound union with Christ. The "hard teaching" that many struggle with, of course, is that only a husband and wife are permitted by God and the Church to engage in sexual activity; unmarried people are not. Just as heterosexual single people are called by God to lead a celibate life, so too are those who experience homosexual inclinations. This is not easy, and they are encouraged to use the helps offered by the Church to "gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 2359). At the same time, the Church has the responsibility to find more meaningful ways to accompany them.

The Church is often viewed as unfair for her teachings. It may therefore come as a surprise that the Catholic Church is arguably the largest organization on our planet that stands up against discrimination towards homosexual persons: "They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (CCC, 2358). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reminds us: "All people are created in the image and likeness of God and thus possess an innate human dignity that must be acknowledged and respected.... 'It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs.'" **To be humble and honest, though, we Catholics often fail to live up to our own teachings, including this one about treating persons experiencing same-sex attraction with the love and respect they deserve. And we need to acknowledge the pain they have often experienced in feeling alienated by the Church.**

There are a number of key milestones on the journey towards accepting the Church's teachings about homosexuality as being loving – not hateful. Here are seven of them:

1. God exists and "God is love" (1 John 4:16); and true love wills the good of others.

2. Out of love, and for love, God created everything (including human beings). He not only created us, but he revealed to us a plan for our authentic happiness. This plan is partially laid out in the Old Testament, especially in the 10 Commandments, and comes to fulfillment in the New Testament with the moral teachings of Jesus, the second person of the Holy Trinity incarnate. The Church he founded hands down these teachings to us, not to confine us but to set us free.

3. It is actually a loving thing that God gave us a plan for our authentic happiness that goes beyond mere pleasure and the satisfaction of our desires for sex, food, etc. Imagine going to a car dealer and the owner tells you that the car you just bought does not come with a manual. God is not like that. Through the Church, he offers us a plan of morality to keep our lives running well and happily, even when difficulties come our way.

4. Out of love, and for love, Christ founded his Church on Peter (aka Cephas – “rock” in Aramaic.) Christ gave this first pope (and his successors) the authority to teach infallibly about faith and morals, promising that the “gates of hell” would not prevail against the Church – a divine promise that would prove false if the pope and the bishops united with him ever officially taught error about faith or morals. We trust in the authority of the Church’s moral teachings because this authority comes from Christ, who is God.

5. The perennial moral teaching of the Catholic Church is well known: marriage is only between a man and a woman, and only a husband and wife may engage in sexual activity. Their sexual union is both for spousal unity and for procreation (i.e., having children). This means all single people, whether heterosexually or homosexually inclined, are called to “fight the good fight” and, with God’s help, remain celibate. “Blessed are the pure of heart,” says the Lord. For a wife and husband, “purity of heart” normally includes uniting sexually; for unmarried people, it means saying no to sexual activity out of love for God, trusting in his plan for human happiness.

6. The Church’s teachings about homosexuality do not mean that the Church is against sex or that she is singling out homosexual persons unjustly. Rather, the Church believes human sexuality is such a precious gift that it is actually holy, and needs to be guided by God’s plan for its use.

7. True love wills the good of the other. If a father and mother saw their child was about to snatch a handful of candy – and they knew there was poison inside – they would grab the child’s hand, out of love, and say: “Stop!” The child would certainly enjoy the pleasure of eating the candy, but the parents understand that the child would be harmed. In a sense, this is the way God the Father and Holy Mother Church view human beings who are tempted to enjoy sexual activity outside of a valid marriage between a man and a woman.

We are made for authentic happiness in God, not just the pursuit of pleasure (hedonism). What the French poet Paul Claudel said about young people really applies to us all: “Youth was not made for pleasure, but for heroism!” And his fellow countryman Léon Bloy wisely noted: “The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint.” If there is one thing the saints show us, it is this: the path to sanctity is often filled with setbacks, stumbling and imperfections. No wonder so many saints emphasize the beauty of going to Confession frequently – to receive the Lord’s forgiveness in what Pope Francis calls “the sacrament of mercy.” All of us, no matter which gender we feel attracted to, can always find refuge in God’s merciful arms.

## RESOURCES

### Gender Identity

“Male and Female he Created them: For a Path of Dialogue on the Issue of Gender in Education” – Congregation for Catholic Education, Vatican City

“Gender theory”/“Gender ideology” (Select Teaching Resources) – United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

### Same-sex Attraction

“Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care” - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

“Always our Children: A Pastoral Message to the Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers” – United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

### Ministries for Individuals Experiencing Same-sex Attraction and their Families

Courage and Encourage: <https://couragerc.org/>

Eden Invitation: <https://www.edeninvitation.com/>

### Theology of the Body

*Men and Women are from Eden* – Dr. Mary Healy

*Theology of the Body for Beginners* – Christopher West

*Theology of the Body in One Hour* – Jason Evert

### Catholic Marriage FAQ

<https://www.foryourmarriage.org/catholic-marriage-faqs/>