

## **PERSONS WITH SAME-SEX ATTRACTION: PASTORAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS** May 2008

The Catholic Independent Schools of Archdiocese of Vancouver (C.I.S.V.A.) has developed this foundation document as a statement of principles to support its schools, families and the Catholic community of the Archdiocese in understanding and living the Faith.

In the Province of British Columbia, the Ministry of Education recognizes the right of Independent schools to teach the secular British Columbia curriculum from their own faith-based perspectives.

The purpose of this document is two-fold:

**A.** To provide a context in which changes to the B.C. curriculum can be evaluated in the light of reason and revelation — what we know about human persons and their relationships from reflection on experience and from the teachings of the Gospel. This Christian anthropology offers us a way of seeing issues of morality according to their core meaning.

**B.** To provide tools for addressing issues in ways that acknowledge and teach the full Christian vision for human life, sexuality and relationships. Questions raised by new curricula can be an opportunity to form students and parents in a deeper appreciation of the goodness of our tradition of moral beliefs.

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## INTRODUCTION

Human experience and the teachings of the Gospel tell us that the complementarities of man and woman is a truth written in the order of nature and reflects God's plan for His creation. Man and woman are drawn together in the bond of marriage, which has two inseparable ends: it expresses the love of husband and wife that is open to the procreation and education of children (CCC 2363).

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. **Respecting Human Dignity:** The foundation of Catholic teaching about life and relationships is respect for the human person. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it" (CCC 1935). Ethical and moral reflection always asks about the true good of the person. This makes real demands on us, warning us to avoid behaviour that is destructive of our human dignity and that of others and calling us to live in ways that promote the capacity for self-giving in authentic relationships and respectful dialogue. The Church is the ultimate inclusive community because it recognizes that everyone is called to the fullness of life, both in this world and in the Kingdom of Heaven.
2. **The Place of Sexuality in God's Plan:** Human beings are "embodied spirits" and the images of God in this world. What we do in the body should always express our dignity as children of God, destined to be with Him in body and soul forever. The message of Jesus that comes to us in the Church necessarily includes teaching about God's plan for sexuality.

"Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others" (CCC 2332).

In fact, the Christian vision for sexuality echoes and perfects the insights that human experience and reflection have traditionally led people to accept and value. Human wisdom and the revelation of God teach us that sexuality is about deep and life-giving relationships that are the source of authentic joy. Pope John Paul II often spoke of the "nuptial meaning of the body." In light of this image, we recognize the union of husband and wife as uniquely expressing self-giving love and commitment. Truly human sexual relations are more about this communion of persons than they are about physical experience. Without the dimension of self-giving and even self-sacrifice, sexual relations are unworthy of persons. Sexual desires that become selfish are disordered and lustful.

Rather than describing behaviour, the term chastity refers to the spiritual and psychological maturity of a person in whom sexuality is properly integrated with other aspects of life. We call it a virtue because it is the power to live well and to relate to self and others in ways that respect their human dignity.

Chastity is the perfection of a person's natural capacity for authentic human relationships. It will be experienced and expressed in different ways depending on a person's state in life — single, married, the priesthood or the consecrated life. What is constant, though, is the way that chastity integrates body and spirit in the service of self-giving love. To fail in chastity means the person has not achieved the integrity of self-giving love that our Creator intends us to enjoy. Mistaking sex for intimacy — often reflected in promiscuity — leads to a sense of emptiness and frustration in relationships.

## SEXUAL ATTRACTION AND SIN

In God's wise design, the beauty of the human body exerts strong sensual attractions. In His plan, these can be a beautiful experience of human love. As we grow up, our attractions and feelings become directed to other persons in the form of affection, friendship, romance, sexual desire. The moral issue concerns our response to these powerful forces.

The Church teaches that it is necessary for human beings to recognize and accept our sexual identity as male ordered toward female, or female ordered toward male. However, "the number of men and women with deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible ... and we must accept them with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination should be avoided" (CCC 2358). Such unjust discrimination is always condemned by the Church.

While the Church is very clear that unjust discrimination is sinful, it is equally clear that the moral law requires that we make discriminating judgments to reflect divine truth. Genuine love and respect for the person may require that we refuse to approve a particular lifestyle or particular action. In the case of same-sex attraction, because we recognize the dignity of each person, we acknowledge that homosexual acts are intrinsically wrong and contrary to natural moral law.

The Church does not claim to explain the origins of same-sex attraction or desires; it states that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered" (CCC 2357), which simply means these acts were not intended by God the Creator in His plan for the human person. Persons are not disordered; homosexual inclinations or acts are disordered (CCC 2357, 2358). As in every moral question, the Church teaches that "... we can judge that an act is in itself a grave offence, [but] we must entrust judgment of persons to the justice and mercy of God" (CCC 1861).

In general, homosexual feelings and attractions are not freely chosen and are not sinful. What is sinful is any sexual genital expression outside the bond of marriage between a man and a woman.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE LANGUAGE**

We should always use language and terminology that is respectful and inclusive of all persons and which reflects the truth about human life. In contrast, the language of popular culture may often mask or even contradict the truths of reason and revelation the Church is called to proclaim. In speaking the truth about the human person, the Church always seeks those words that will express the fullness of truth and the fullness of life to which we are called. This is why theologians seek accuracy and clarity in their words.

The words “gay” and “lesbian” are political terms that reflect a person’s self-identification with same-sex attraction and a homosexual lifestyle. Such language expresses a political and social agenda. Such language reduces a person to his or her predominant sexual attractions. In her documents, the Church does not use these terms, nor does she identify people as “straight” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons, 1986, n. 16). In a similar way, the term “sexual orientation” is misleading because it implies an inborn and unchanging characteristic of the person. Instead, the Church speaks of persons with “same-sex attraction.”

Men and women should not be reduced to a political-sexual identity. To label someone in this way reinforces the perception that he or she is locked into a certain identity that limits freedom. Imposing the names “gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered” on people as unchangeable categories discourages the possibility of spiritual, emotional and psychosexual development. Instead, we should recognize their truest dignity as persons, created in the image and likeness of God, who are called to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit (CCC 1695). The call to conversion and to chastity (CCC 1428, 2337) is a call to transformation for each and every one of us.

## **MARRIAGE IN GOD’S PLAN**

“The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament” (CCC 1601).

## **PERSONAL FULFILLMENT UNITIVE AND PROCREATIVE**

By their very nature, sexual relations have a two-fold purpose: they are the source of new life for families and society through the gift of children, and they express and seal the love and commitment of spouses to each other. The unique community that results, the family, is the basic cell of society and the Church. In the experience of intimacy, solidarity and self-sacrifice in the family, spouses and children are formed for the fullest life.

## **SOCIAL IMPACT: PRIVATE VERSUS PUBLIC**

Western culture prizes individuality and autonomy, often to the point of overlooking the social nature of human life, but the choices and actions of individuals cannot be considered outside the context of

the community of persons in which they live. The “common good” is a term used to describe the interests of the wider community, which has a vital interest in the choices of individuals, since it is influenced for better or for worse by their actions. Every culture has recognized the importance of marriage and family for the well-being of the community. The claim that sexuality is exclusively a matter of private choice ignores this essential element of human life. Society has a stake in every marriage, because the family that results is the most basic cell of community life. When we speak of the Christian family as a “domestic Church” we are affirming the same truth. The family is the setting for the growth and development of persons, both spouses and children. The role of a father and a mother is uniquely important for the full development of their child. Especially in modern North American society, circumstances often remove one or other parent from a child’s upbringing; this is a loss to be regretted rather than an argument for “new” definitions of family.

### **CONTEMPORARY MORAL BIASES: WHAT IS THE BIG PROBLEM?**

Marriage is instituted by God as a life-long union for both the good of husband and wife and the procreation and education of children. Marriage is not created by governments nor can it be redefined by them. Efforts to promote recognition of the relationship of two persons of the same sex as a marriage ignore the complementarity between sexes and the natural generation of children. However well intentioned the wish to call same-sex unions “marriage,” such partnerships can in no way be regarded as equivalent to heterosexual marriage.

### **PROMOTING GROWTH IN HOLINESS AND VIRTUE**

Growth in Christian holiness begins with a vision of human dignity based on being created in the image of God. As images of God, we are capable of knowing, loving, and serving Him, and each other. Our call to an eternal destiny leads us to live in this world with the attitudes expressed in the eight Beatitudes.

We image God by entering into a community of persons, reflecting the loving communion of the Father, Son, and Spirit. We experience our God-given freedom in a relationship of trust and accountability to God and the Christian community.

Central to everyone’s growth in holiness is the Spirit-assisted acquisition of virtues. The cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude along with the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity are the seven good habits of highly effective Christians. Rooted in our minds and wills, these habits turn us to God and strengthen us to resist temptation. These inner powers are essential for our pursuit of joy and fulfillment in the Christian life.

Sacramental living brings us joy and peace by helping us live out God’s plan for a chaste life. The sacraments restore us as the images of God and inspire us to seek beauty, truth and holiness in our living.

Baptism and Confirmation give us new life in Christ, but this new life is threatened by sin. The sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation involves a conversion to God. Mindful of our own sinfulness

and God's mercy, the Sacrament helps us approach Christian perfection and fulfillment. The Sacrament of the Eucharist unites us in an intimate communion of friendship with Christ, the source of our strength, who fulfills the deepest desires of every human heart. Frequent reception of Holy Communion helps us grow in human love, perfects our human relationships and enables us to grow in chastity and every other virtue.

Pastoral care and community support for those with same-sex attractions: The Church embraces all peoples. Every day our parish communities gather family members, friends and fellow parishioners who struggle with many crosses in their efforts to live as disciples of Christ.

It is important that individuals with same-sex attraction feel support and love from their families. It is equally important that those who experience same-sex attraction receive support from the Catholic community in seeking to live a chaste and fulfilled life. Our Church and schools are the settings for every person's journey to live in chastity.

Within the Archdiocese of Vancouver, the Catholic Family Services (CFS) counselling agency provides confidential, professional counselling services for those experiencing same-sex attractions. CFS also provides counselling to parents, siblings, teachers or others who wish professional guidance in responding to those who experience same-sex attractions. As well, for almost twenty years, Courage, an international Catholic pro-chastity ministry, has been offering spiritual direction and support in our archdiocese to persons with same-sex attractions.

## **CONCLUSION**

The challenge of living as disciples of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic, secular society requires a continual effort to grow in knowledge and appreciation of the Gospel message. At the same time, the moral issues emerging in our communities and schools offer an opportunity to articulate the good news of the Christian vision of life and sexuality.

Our belief in the dignity of persons teaches us to discard labels and address true human needs. The Church, described by Pope Paul VI as "an expert in humanity," confidently upholds the wisdom that comes from reason and revelation, knowing that every individual seeks that truth.

Chastity is the power to live fully the gift of human sexuality as God designed it. The struggle to live up to His plan requires effort and grace, especially in a cultural milieu that often presents a vision of human life that contradicts Gospel values. The pastoral and educational initiatives of the Catholic community have one goal: to help everyone live in the light of the truth.

In the New Testament, St. Peter urged believers to be always prepared to give an answer to those who asked them about the reason for their hope (1 Peter 3:15). It is our privilege and our vocation to bring the Gospel's light to bear on every situation and offer support and hope to those who struggle to find a fuller life.

## GLOSSARY

### CHASTITY

Chastity means the positive integration of sexuality within the person. Sexuality becomes truly human when it is truly integrated in a correct way into the relationship of one person to another. Chastity is a moral virtue, a gift of God, a grace and a fruit of the Holy Spirit. (CCCC 488, CCC 2337, 2338)

### DIGNITY

“The dignity of the human person is rooted in his or her creation in the image and likeness of God. Endowed with a spiritual and immortal soul, intelligence and free will, the human person is ordered to God and called in soul and in body to eternal beatitude”. (CCCC 358, CCC 1699-1715)

### DISORDERED

The term “objective disorder” is a philosophical term. It is used to describe homosexual attractions because such attractions can never lead to a morally good (objectively ordered) sexual act, e.g., one that is complete according to God’s plan. Homosexual acts do not have the objective possibility of being fruitful in the transmission of life, according to the plan inscribed by God in our human nature. Homosexual acts do not use the body for what the Creator intended. Furthermore, they do not acknowledge that God has created men and women with complementary dimensions on the psychological, physical, and biological levels (John Paul II, 1999).

The Church does not condemn people for simply having these attractions. We have all been created in the image of God and are extremely precious to Him. However, since the Church recognizes that homosexual acts are always immoral, the inclination to engage in such acts is, philosophically speaking, objectively disordered.

### FAMILY

“Family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honour God and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society”. (CCC 2207)

### HOMOSEXUALITY

Homosexuality is a persistent genital attraction to persons of the same sex. Persistent indicates that the attraction carries over into adulthood. It is well-known that many teenagers who think they are homosexual become physically attracted to persons of the other sex as they enter adulthood. (John Harvey, 2008).

## **MARRIAGE**

“The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament”. (CCC 1660, CIC 1055/1)

## **NATURAL LAW**

“The natural law which is inscribed by the Creator on the heart of every person consists in a participation in the wisdom and the goodness of God. It expresses the original moral sense which enables one to discern by reason the good and the bad. It is universal and immutable and determines the basis of the duties and fundamental rights of the person as well as those of the human community and civil law”. (CCCC 416, CCC 1954-1960, 1978-1979)

## **VIRTUE**

“A virtue is a stable and firm disposition to do the good. ‘The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God’. (St Gregory of Nyssa). There are human virtues and theological virtues.” (CCCC 377, CCC 1803, 1833)