

## **Lesbian/Gay Ministry in the Catholic Church: A Vision for the Future**

*A Statement of New Ways Ministry Issued at the Fifth National Symposium  
Louisville, Kentucky  
March 10, 2002*

As Catholics who put their faith and hope in the God Who created the world through an almighty Word, redeemed the world through the Word made flesh, and sanctified the world through tongues of fire that speak all languages, we are impelled by the Gospel to speak for justice for the gay/lesbian members of our Church. The Christian message has entered its third millennium, and yet for much of that time the needs, concerns, and gifts of lesbian/gay people have been shrouded in silence.

At the Second Vatican Council, Church leaders called Catholics to open up to the reality of the world, to respond readily to those who are oppressed and marginalized, and to speak the Gospel boldly to a world that aches for a hopeful message. As Catholics renewed by Vatican II, we have been called out of silence. We pledge our solidarity with our gay/lesbian brothers and sisters. We call upon Church leaders at all levels "to pledge to find new ways to communicate the truth of Christ" to lesbian/gay people. Specifically, we ask that:

- 1) The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops initiate a serious and sustained national dialogue with gay/lesbian people.** For our Church to grow in fullness, we need to hear all voices to discern the call of the Spirit. No effective pastoral ministry can take place if the Church's shepherds do not know about the painful and joyful events that lesbian/gay people experience as members of the Body of Christ. All individual bishops need to do likewise in their own dioceses.
- 2) Diocesan and pastoral leaders develop ministry programs for gay/lesbian people and their families** that are part of the whole fabric of the worshipping community's life. Lesbian/gay people exist everywhere, so the need for pastoral ministry programs exists in every diocese and parish. Educational programs that affirm lesbian/gay people and that eradicate fearful and prejudicial attitudes should be developed vigorously. Social and spiritual programs that explain and satisfy the human needs for relationship, friendship, intimacy, and participation need to be an integral part of pastoral ministry.
- 3) Theologians, bishops, and scholars devote serious time and study to the ethics of same-sex relationships.** As the world witnesses loving, devoted, and faithful same-sex couples, it is becoming increasingly obvious that scholastic answers no longer are convincing. Church theology and teaching need to engage in dialogue with the lived experience of lesbian/gay people of faith, academic disciplines, and secular cultures.
- 4) Religious educators, school teachers, principals, and textbook publishers develop programs and materials that reflect accurate images of gay/lesbian people.** Homosexuality can no longer be cloaked in lies, stereotypes, and jokes. Education about homosexuality should be an essential part of any curriculum that prepares students to follow Christ's command to "Love one another." We urge faculties and educational administrators to ensure that their communities are safe and supportive places for gay/lesbian young people.
- 5) Campus ministers, school chaplains, youth and young adult ministers foster a climate among young people that is knowledgeable and respectful** of lesbian/gay reality. Young people beginning to experience the gift of sexuality need to know that Church facilities and ministries are open to discussion about their concerns. Educational and spiritual programs on sexuality must include discussions of homosexuality, with appropriate and honest accommodations made for different age groups and maturity levels. Ministers need to lead by example so that gay/lesbian people, especially those in their midst, will be valued.
- 6) Pastors, principals, personnel directors and supervisors provide supportive work atmospheres so that lesbian/gay Church personnel--clergy, lay, religious--can disclose their sexual orientations** to colleagues and constituents, if they so choose. Dioceses, parishes, and other places of Church employment should adopt public policies of non-discrimination as the first step toward a supportive workplace. Within the Catholic community, visibility and self-disclosure should be the prerogative of all. Lesbian/gay people have enriched our Church's life for centuries. Our Church would be bereft without their presence.

**7) Seminary rectors, formation teams, vocation directors, priests' personnel directors, vicars for religious provide educational and personal/spiritual development** programs for gay/lesbian priests, religious, seminarians, and candidates. Celibacy does not negate sexuality or sexual orientation but calls for people to learn new ways of intimacy. All clergy and religious, regardless of orientation, need to be educated and sensitized to the gifts and needs of their lesbian/gay peers.

**8) Pastoral counselors, therapists, confessors, and spiritual directors provide a supportive environment** for people who are coming to terms with a homosexual orientation. These ministerial settings are often the first place where people speak about their homosexuality. These ministers need to exercise professionalism, integrity, and compassion, avoiding any suggestion that a gay or lesbian person is inferior or that a sexual orientation should be changed or reversed by therapy or prayer.

**9) Family life ministers and pastors be attentive to the needs of parents and families** of gay/lesbian people. Families are primary communities of God's love and care. Church ministers need to help families understand that while a son's or daughter's disclosure of a homosexual orientation may seem to be a time of grief, it is certainly a time of grace. Family members should be empowered to minister to one another.

**10) Diocesan and parish social action directors advocate for the rights of lesbian/gay people** and encourage Catholics to protect the human, civic, and baptismal equality of all. Catholic social teaching requires that the dignity of every human person be respected. All people should live free of the threat of discrimination, oppression, hatred, and violence. Gay/lesbian people must never be harmed by individuals, groups, political parties, or governments because of their sexual orientation, and their rights must be protected by law.

**11) Lesbian/gay Catholics continue their ministry to one another and their prophetic ministry** to the Church. We urge gay/lesbian Catholics to remain within the Church. We ask them to find Catholic communities that will sustain their faith. The Church needs their prophetic witness and challenge, as well as their struggles, joys, and gifts.

**12) All Catholics and people of good will respect and celebrate the diversity of people** with which God has blessed us. We encourage all to reverence the gift of sexuality that helps us share our love creatively and joyously. We recommend that all Catholic institutions make explicit welcome to gay/lesbian people. We ask lesbian/gay Catholics, as they are able, to "come out" to the Church so that we, as one Church rich in diversity, may image Christ to the world. We urge all Catholic individuals, organizations, religious communities, parishes, institutions, schools, associations, and societies to join in making this vision a reality by endorsing this statement with their names, by living the policies and principles it recommends, and by praying for a renewal of the Church.

#### Endorsement Form

I endorse the above statement and I pledge to help make this vision a reality.

Name of endorsing person or organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Authorizing signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to New Ways Ministry, 4012 29th Street, Mt. Rainier, MD 20712 by October 31, 2002.

Please duplicate this statement and circulate it to others.

For additional copies, go to [www.NewWaysMinistry.org](http://www.NewWaysMinistry.org), call (301) 277-5674, or write to [NewWaysM@aol.com](mailto:NewWaysM@aol.com)