

*Furthering the
Reign of God,
Where All
are Welcome*



March 16, 2023

Archbishop Alexander Sample
The Archdiocese of Portland
2838 E. Burnside St.
Portland, OR 97214

Dear Archbishop Sample,

The following is a compilation of the responses to the Archdiocese document, "A Catholic Response to Gender Identity Theory: Catechesis and Pastoral Guidelines" from The Madeleine Pastoral Council and School Advisory Board:

The Madeleine community appreciates the opportunity to respond and give input to the Archdiocese document, "A Catholic Response to Gender Identity Theory: Catechesis and Pastoral Guidelines". We understand the importance of lovingly addressing the questions of gender identity. We offer our thoughts based on the headings offered in the document , although in our discussions reversed the order for reasons to be explained.

IV. Whole-Person Affirmation: A Catholic Response

Difficult discussions are best begun with what we can all agree. Whole person affirmation would be the preferred place to start our response as this is deeply rooted in the Gospels and we would hope that the Archdiocese begins any guideline regarding care of transgender persons with this affirmation as well. Additionally whole person affirmation is meaningless unless it exists within our community of believers. It must be welcoming and inclusive. As Pope Francis states in The Joy of the Gospel:



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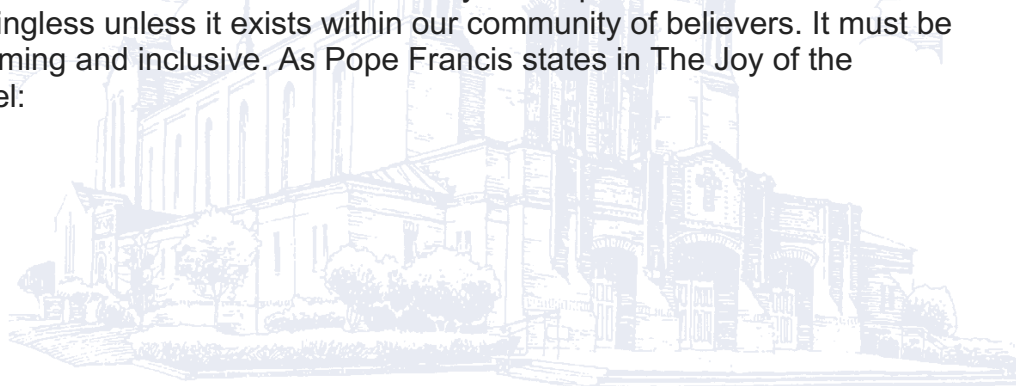
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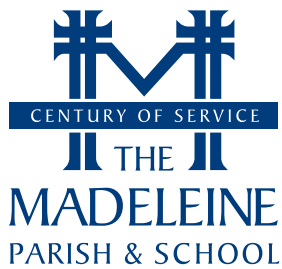
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“The salvation which God has wrought, and the Church joyfully proclaims is for everyone. God has found a way to unite every human being in every age. He has chosen to call them together as a people and not as isolated individuals. No one is saved by himself or herself, individually or by his or her own efforts. God attracts us by taking into account the complex interweaving of personal relationships entailed in the life of a human community. This people which God has chosen and called is the Church. Jesus did not tell the apostles to form an exclusive and elite group.”
(Pope Francis, Joy of the Gospel, Paragraph 113)

So might the Church’s approach be to emphasize whole-person affirmation in a simple, concise statement in a way that is welcoming? We propose shortening this leading section with the following introduction:

Whole-person affirmation begins by affirming the belovedness of every person. The first and most important truth that every young person needs to hear is this: You are infinitely loved. You are a living, breathing icon of God, and in this very moment, God is willing your existence because God delights in you.

This introductory statement would be followed by paragraphs 5,6 and 9 which stress avoidance of stereotypes and importance of accompaniment.

III. Pastoral Guidelines

Much of what is included in this section seems to distance the struggle of an individual and family from the Church in a “thou shalt not” framework. We believe as each person is unique, so the approach, possible accommodation and how we accompany will be unique. A one size fits all approach allows us to distance ourselves from a situation that may be uncomfortable for some, as we can point to the “rules” and go on our way.

In addition to one size fits all, the Pastoral Guidelines, as drafted, appear impractical, unclear and incomplete:

- (1) Impractical because the administrators, faculties, coaching staffs and other school leaders cannot, as a practical matter effect or enforce the guidelines for “Language”, “Facilities”, “Sports and extracurriculars” or “Medication”.
- (2) Unclear because there is no guidance provided for determining the difference between “ biological” and “self-perceived gender”.

(3) Incomplete because there is no guidance to encourage “Whole-Person Affirmation” and how to listen, love and offer “a positive vision of the human person” or how to offer “a path of accompaniment for gender-questioning youth”, nor is there affirmative guidance for teachers, priests, parents and others for communicating love and protecting such youth from harm, ostracizing or exclusion from a loving community.

“Parental involvement” is crucial and essential. “Medication” must be a confidential matter between parents, students and physicians. To the extent that schools are involved in administering medication they generally must not become involved in making medical decisions for students or assessing the appropriateness of treatments. If parents are not present the people who serve in loco parentis must be involved.

Finally, the net result of the Guidelines is to create an excluded class of individuals who are in some ways segregated from the school community.

II. Gender Identity Theory

How one assimilates the familial, cultural and biological influences into expression of gender is complex and a unique journey for every individual. To evaluate the risks and benefits of various Gender Affirming Care interventions seems beyond our purview as many of these treatments continue to be debated in the medical community. It seems best to stick with what we know with certainty and base our actions on this certainty.

What we know: Youth that are gender-questioning are at increased risk of social isolation, depression, anxiety, bullying and suicide.

What we can do: As the Body of Christ we are called to love. This is not as easy as we would wish. It involves concrete, visible steps that get us involved in the lives of others. Rather than the “thou shalt not” approach our pastoral guidance should be the “thou shall” steps to help us accompany and love those struggling in our midst.

When we in the Church have “an intimate encounter with God” we are empowered to do this: “Seeing with the eyes of Christ, we can give to others much more than their outward necessities; we can give them the look of love which they crave. Here we see the necessary interplay between love of God and love of neighbor, which the First Letter of John speaks of with such insistence.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Paragraph 18)



I. The Truth and Dignity of the Human Person

As set forth in the bottom right paragraph on page three of the Guidelines, we affirm that as the incarnation itself proclaims, God loves us body and soul. We are not spiritual creatures alone. Our bodies count. Matter is real and good. The Genesis account proclaims that God created man “in His own image”, “male and female He created them”. It is therefore central to the Gospel that God is both male and female or that he transcends gender, but both male and female are made in God’s image. The difficulty here is that trans people consider themselves to be the gender they discover and God created them in the way they deeply perceive themselves to be. Male and Female He created them. A trans person just understands him or her self to be one or the other...not a sinner in need of forgiveness because of that identity.

Even if transgender status were, in itself sinful, which we believe it is not, it is wrong to think it possible to “hate the sin but love the sinner” because the “sinner” is so fully identified with what some call his or her sin. The phrase only allows the person in question to experience hatred rather than love.

We urge the Archdiocese:

- 1-conduct additional study.
- 2-convene gatherings of parents, trans people, teachers, priests, religious and perhaps those from the medical community and listen to ways to address transgender issues and to express love to individual people.
- 3-engage in silence, study, discernment and prayerful preparation of methods and guidance for educators who are on the frontlines, teaching the love of Christ.

Respectfully,

Father Mike Biewend, Pastor